

Religion, Politics and Society in Aberdeen,
1543-1593.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been written solely by

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Abstract of Thesis

The aim of this thesis is to examine the impact of the Reformation on a close-knit, intensely conservative urban community. Aberdeen embraced religious change slowly and reluctantly. The pace of events was tightly controlled by the merchant oligarchy which had installed itself at the centre of burgh affairs, concentrating most of the economic and political resources of the burgh in its own hands. The key to their power lay in their domination of the council chamber and their manipulation of the burgh's constitution in their own favour. The arrival of the Reformation in the burgh enabled this oligarchy to extend its control over ecclesiastical life. The prominent place given to laymen in the life of the new Kirk allowed the merchant oligarchs of Aberdeen to dominate the kirk session and influence decisively the process of Protestantisation of the burgh.

During these years Aberdeen had to face a number of external threats to its liberties and independence. In the first half of the century the burgh was subjected to attacks from local lairds, who constantly sought opportunities to increase their power at the burgesses' expense. Aberdeen's resistance to such expansionist ambitions consolidated the burgh's sense of identity and community. As a result the burgesses of Aberdeen came to prize their direct relationship with the crown; in successive conflicts between centre and locality Aberdeen always remained loyal to the crown, even though such loyalty involved the hostility of the earl of Huntly, the most powerful local noble.

In the decades after the Reformation, as Protestantism grew in confidence and as memories of Catholicism began to fade, the

merchant oligarchy of Aberdeen came under increasing pressure from those who desired social and religious change. The political balance within the town had begun to shift as the members of the governing élite became progressively more isolated from the community they represented. During the course of the sixteenth century the wealthier merchants had identified more closely with the local lairds. Many of the most prominent burghesses owned country estates in the vicinity of the burgh. As time passed their interests in Aberdeen declined, both economically and politically. In the last decades of the sixteenth century pressure from the craft guilds and the powerful, but unrepresented lawyers in the burgh, resulted in a drastic change in town government. The notion of the burgh community was expanded to include the members of the craft aristocracy and the legal establishment. The language and ideology of the new Kirk was useful in this process of re-alignment of political forces in Aberdeen. The fall of the Menzies family, who had dominated the burgh for almost a century, marked the beginning of the end of traditional government in Aberdeen and the gradual retreat of Catholicism from the town to the country.

Acknowledgements

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I must also thank a number of people in Aberdeen who showed hospitality and encouragement to me during my research trips there. My thanks go especially to Miss Judith Cripps of the Aberdeen Town Archives, who gave me every assistance in my work on the Aberdeen manuscripts. I extend a special word of thanks to the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, Queen's Cross, Aberdeen, and to Canon John Simon of Aberdeen Cathedral, who showed me hospitality whilst I lived in Aberdeen. I would also like to thank Bishop Conti of Aberdeen, and Dr and Mrs Leslie Macfarlane for entertaining me and restoring me in periods of discouragement whilst I was working in Aberdeen.

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Abbreviations:

On their first appearing sources are cited in full, thereafter they appear in an abbreviated, easily recognisable form. Those documents or printed works which are frequently cited are abbreviated as follows:

<u>Aberdeen Burgh Chrs.</u> ,	<u>Charters and other Writs illustrating the History of the Royal Burgh of Aberdeen</u> , ed. P. J. Anderson (Aberdeen, 1980).
<u>Aberdeen Burgh Recs.</u> ,	<u>Early Records of the Burgh of Aberdeen, 1317, 1398-1407</u> , ed. W. C. Dickinson (Scottish History Society, 1957).
<u>Aberdeen Fasti.</u>	<u>Fasti Aberdonenses: Selections from the Records of the University and King's College of Aberdeen</u> (Spalding Club, 1854).
<u>Aberdeen Registrum</u> ,	<u>Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis</u> (Spalding and Maitland Clubs, 1845).
<u>Aberdeen St Nicholas Cartularium</u> ,	<u>Cartularium Ecclesiae Sancti Nicolai Aberdonensis</u> (New Spalding Club, 1888-92).
<u>ADC</u> ,	<u>The Acts of the Lords of Council in Civil Causes</u> , edd. T. Thomson and others (Edinburgh, 1839 and 1918-).
<u>ADCP</u> ,	<u>Acts of the Lords of Council in Public Affairs 1501-1554: Selections from Acta Dominorum Concilii</u> , ed. R. K. Hannay (Edinburgh, 1932).
<u>APS</u> ,	<u>The Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland</u> , edd. T. Thomson and C. Innes (Edinburgh, 1814-75).
Boece, <u>Vitae</u> ,	<u>Hectoris Boetii Murthlacensium et Aberdonensium Episcoporum Vitae</u> (New Spalding Club, 1894).
<u>BUK</u> ,	<u>Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland</u> , ed. T. Thomson (Bannatyne and Maitland Clubs, 1839-45).
<u>Burghs Conv. Recs.</u> ,	<u>Records of the Convention of the Royal Burghs of Scotland</u> , ed. J. D. Marwick (Edinburgh, 1866-90).
Calderwood, <u>History</u> ,	<u>History of the Church of Scotland by Mr. David Calderwood</u> (Wodrow Society, 1842-9).
<u>CSP Foreign, Edward VI</u> ,	<u>Calendar of State Papers, Foreign of the reign of Edward VI, 1547-1553</u> , ed. W. B. Turnbull (London, 1861).

- CSP Foreign, Eliz., Calendar of the State Papers Foreign, Elizabeth, eds. J. Stevenson and others (London, 1863-1950).
- CSP Roman, Calendar of State Papers, Rome, ed. J. M. Rigg (1916-26).
- CSP Scot., Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots, 1547-1603, eds. J. Bain and others (London, 1898-1969).
- CSP Spanish, Calendar of State Papers, Spanish, eds. G. Bergenroth and others (London, 1862-1954).
- Council Register of Aberdeen, Extracts from the Council Register of Aberdeen, 1398-1625, ed. J. Stuart (Spalding Club, 1844-48).
- DTC, Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique (Paris, 1930-47).
- Diurnal of Occurents, A Diurnal of Remarkable Occurents that have passed within the country of Scotland, since the death of King James the Fourth till the year 1575 (Bannatyne and Maitland Clubs, 1833).
- Dowden, Bishops, J. Dowden, The Bishops of Scotland, eds., (Glasgow, 1912).
- ER, The Exchequer Rolls of Scotland, eds. J. Stuart and others (Edinburgh, 1878-1908).
- Hamilton Papers, The Hamilton Papers, ed. J. Bain (Edinburgh, 1890-92).
- Keith, History, R. Keith, History of the Affairs of Church and State in Scotland (Spottiswoode Society, 1844-50).
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Letters and Papers
Henry VIII

Letters and Papers (Foreign and Domestic) of the reign of Henry VIII, ed. J. Brewer and J. Gairdner (London, 1862-1910).

Mary of Lorraine
Corresp.,

The Scottish Correspondence of Mary of Lorraine (Scottish History Society, 1927).

Melville, Diary,

The Autobiography and Diary of Mr. James Melville, ed. R. Pitcairn (Wodrow Society, 1842).

RMS,

Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Scotorum, eds. J. M. Thomson and others (1882-1914).

RPC,

The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland eds. J. H. Burton and others (1877-98).

RSS,

Registrum Secreti Sigilli Regum Scotorum, eds. M. Livingstone and others (1908-).

SHR,

The Scottish Historical Review.

SHS,

The Scottish History Society.

Spottiswoode, History,

History of the Church of Scotland, by John Spottiswoode, eds. M. Russell and M. Napier (Spottiswoode Society, 1847-51).

SRO,

Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh.

TA,

Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland, eds. T. Dickinson and Sir Balfour Paul (1877-1916).

Watt, Fasti,

D. E. R. Watt, Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae Medii Aevi ad annum 1638 (SRS, 1969).

Wodrow Misc.,

The Miscellany of the Wodrow Society (Wodrow Society, 1844).

INTRODUCTION

THE SOURCES.

The principal source used in this work has been the series of town council registers preserved in the Charter Room of the Town House in Aberdeen. The series of folio volumes, containing the records of the proceedings of the Council, Bailie, Guild, and Head Courts, begins in 1398 and runs continuously until the present day. Only one volume, number three covering the period 1413-33 is missing. Nineteen volumes of the council registers deal with the period under examination in this thesis. These volumes range from 600 to 900 pages in length, and are written on both sides of each folio. The paper is of fine quality and was imported from the Low Countries. The same standard of paper is preserved throughout the records during the years covered in this study. The hand is not always clearly legible, and occasionally shows signs of a harrassed secretary attempting to record a fast-flowing argument or debate. The two parts of volume XXXIV of the council registers have some material in common, covering as they do the same period, the end of 1592 and most of 1593. However, some material has been preserved in one volume and omitted from the record of proceedings for the same date in the other. What may have happened in these volumes, and by implication with the other volumes also, is that a fair copy of council meetings was written up some time after the event; such a record was inevitably selective. At some points in the council registers the crabbed and hasty style of writing suggests that the rough rather than the fair copy was bound into the registers. Thus, the burgh records for this period are remarkably complete, but they do

not necessarily tell the whole story.

The continuity of the style of the registers was encouraged by the long-serving clerks responsible for their compilation. The town clerkship itself was held by the provost, who was always a member of the Menzies family during this period. The provost was assisted by a principal clerk and a depute. John Kennedy, a prominent notary with an influence on almost every burgh institution, held the post for a long time, being appointed depute clerk in 1568,¹ and principal clerk in 1588.² He was succeeded as principal clerk by Thomas Mollison in 1593.³ Mollison had formerly acted as Kennedy's deputy and in 1591 he had drawn up a catalogue of the burgh archives as they then stood.⁴ The personality of the clerks rarely obtrudes in the records, save on certain occasions when a brief prayer or word is found written there. The prayers are to be found in the margins of the council registers, or at the head of a new section or volume. The frequency of such brief aspirations, which are always Catholic in tone, increases after the Reformation and they are to be found in the manuscripts dating from as late as the 1580s.⁵ John Kennedy was summoned to appear before the privy council as a suspected Catholic sympathiser in 1569, these curious marginalia may represent his true opinions on the subject of religion.⁶

The burgesses not only carefully preserved their council registers they also kept guard over the sasine registers of the town. Those dating from the period of the events described in this thesis were mostly the work of John Kennedy, although one or two volumes were compiled by Masters John Nicholson and Thomas Mollison.⁷ In Kennedy's volumes the property transactions of the

burgh's inhabitants are recorded in a bold hand. Occasionally other matters are dealt with, such as the protest recorded by the bishop and certain local gentry at the stripping of the lead from the cathedral roof in Old Aberdeen. Kennedy's books were obviously of some value to the town. He displayed some anxiety about their fate after his death. Shortly before he died he ordered that his protocol books be placed in a chest which was to be locked with three separate keys. The keys were to be distributed in turn amongst three burgh worthies. The chest was then to be deposited in safe-keeping in the town's common library where it would form part of the burgh's patrimony.⁸

Throughout the latter half of the sixteenth century the town paid careful attention to the preservation of its archives. On a number of occasions when hostilities threatened to engulf it, the burgesses dispatched the town's 'evidences' to safety in neighbouring strongholds.⁹ Control of the charters and records of the burgh greatly increased the power of those who held them, as the Menzies discovered to their advantage.¹⁰ The vigilance of the burgesses in protecting their archives also extended to the preservation of a comprehensive series of charters, and a fragmentary collection of burgh and guildry accounts. Unfortunately, only two stent rolls survive for this period, one for 1574 and the other for 1592. The essential structure of the following study has therefore been laid on the substantial foundations of the council registers and the registers of sasines.

King's College Aberdeee, both as an ecclesiastical settlement and a Gordon stronghold, suffered heavily from the troubled state of the north after 1560. Its own archives for this period

consist largely of charters recording gifts and endowments offered to it by benefactors. Charges were made after the Reformation that the staff, under the leadership of Alexander Anderson, dilapidated the resources of the college. However, Principal Anderson's defence of King's in 1560, and the rich collection of charters and deeds preserved in its archives is sufficient disproof of this allegation.¹¹ The collection of charters may be rich, and it may also reveal the involvement of the local community in the pattern of endowment of the university, but it is not of great value in charting the course of the Reformation in Old Aberdeen. There is a great lack of documentary material for this period in the history of the university, and recourse must be made to the resources of the Scottish Record Office and to surviving collections of printed books to make good the deficiency.

The north-east of Scotland has been well-served by the tireless efforts of the editors of the volumes of documents of local interest which have appeared under the auspices of the Spalding, and New Spalding Clubs. In this way the records of the diocese have been preserved and transcribed in Innes' edition of the Aberdeen Registrum. Whilst the documentary remains of the parish kirk feature in the volumes of the Cartularium of St Nicholas. The two colleges of Aberdeen, King's and Marischal, are also well-covered by Anderson's editions of the Aberdeen Fasti and the Fasti Academiae Mariscallanae. The town's council and its kirk session have been less well-served by the volumes devoted to selections from their records. Stuart's two volume edition of the Extracts from the Burgh Records of Aberdeen is frequently inaccurate in its dating of events, whilst his Selections from the

Ecclesiastical Records of Aberdeen suffers from similar errors, amounting in one case to misplacing an event by five years.¹²

These resources, supplemented by those listed in the bibliography, have been the principal supports of this thesis.

1. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxvi, fo. 391.
2. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxvv, fo. 459.
3. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxiv, fo. 962.
4. Extracts from the Council Register of the Burgh of Aberdeen, 1398-1625, ed. J. Stuart (Aberdeen, 1844-48), pp. viii-ix.
5. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxiv, fos. 132, 182; xxv, fo. 156; xxx, fo. 1.
6. RPC, i, p. 619.
7. Charters and other Writs illustrating the History of the Royal Burgh of Aberdeen, ed. P. J. Anderson (Aberdeen, 1890) pp. 410-11.
8. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxii, fo. 528.
9. Council Register of Aberdeen, ii, p. 6.
10. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxiv part 1 fo. 395.
11. G.D. Henderson, The Founding of Marischal College, Aberdeen (Aberdeen, 1947), p. 52.
12. Selections from the records of the Kirk Session, Presbytery and Synod of Aberdeen (Spalding Club, 1846), p. 14.

CHAPTER ONE

The Shape of the Burgh Community.

The sixteenth century burgh of Aberdeen clustered round three hills which rose sharply from the northern banks of the river Dee. The Castle hill and St Katharine's hill dominated the town on the east, while the Woolman hill and the Dee loch marked the northern and south-western boundaries respectively. From the eastern edge of the burgh the ground fell away sharply to the harbour, the source of Aberdeen's wealth and its window on the world. At the heart of the town lay the Castlegate, ringed by the public buildings of the burgh and the large houses of the wealthy merchants, local gentry and nobility.. This broad open space held the flesh market at its west end and the fish market at the east. The most densely built-up area appears to have flanked the Broadgate and the Gallowgate which led north from the west end of the Castlegate past the Greyfriars church to Old Aberdeen and the bridge over the Don. The town was compact but not overcrowded being well-provided with gardens and even small orchards. In 1661 Parson Gordon of Rothiemay was able to describe Aberdeen as looking 'as if it stood in a garding or litle wood'.¹ The prospect of the burgh in 1561 could not have been substantially different.

A town wall, one of the principal means of marking the difference between town and country, was lacking in Aberdeen, possibly due to the unevenness of the site and the expenditure such a project would warrant. In 1529 the council had considered walling the town, even taking the advice of the noted local architect and ecclesiastic Alexander Galloway who had worked on King's College, the Greyfriars church and the bridge over the Dee.² The plan was never completed and, like many other towns, Aberdeen was forced to rely for its defensive perimeter on the continuous line of back dykes which stretched away from the narrow frontages of the citizen's booths and houses. Stone-built ports,

closed at night, protected the burgh during times of civil unrest and restrained the incursions of local gentry eager to extend their influence from the country into the town.³ On a number of occasions the town was the object of assault, but the Leslie and other Garioch lairds in 1525,⁴ the Forbes in 1530,⁵ the earl of Huntly during the civil war,⁶ and the Leslie once again in 1587.⁷ During such attacks the gates were closed and chains stretched across the streets to prevent horsemen manoeuvring. Even the architecture of the burgh's houses, with their high walls and low entrance gates enclosing a series of small courtyards, were incorporated into the defensive system of the burgh.⁸ Thus, the burgh was not simply a community of individuals, it was a complex of households each with duties and responsibilities as well as rights, one of the chief responsibilities being watching and warding, defending the burgh from the attacks of its enemies. Throughout the sixteenth century there were constant complaints against those who preferred to remain on their estates outside the burgh, enjoying the status and privileges of membership of the burgh community whilst evading its responsibilities.⁹ In Aberdeen privilege always had to be earned and defended from the predatory interests of outsiders.

It is difficult to give an accurate estimate of the population of Aberdeen in the second half of the sixteenth century. During the period 1543-1593 795 men were admitted to the freedom of the burgh.¹⁰ If it is assumed that a burgess' life covered a span of twenty-five to thirty-five years that would give an approximate number of 390 freemen in the burgh at any one time.¹¹ Assessments of the total population have ranged from 5,833 in 1581 rising to 7,301 in 1592, proposed by William Kennedy, to about 4,000 in the 1590s suggested by G.D. Henderson.¹² Kennedy's figure is inadequate, based as it is simply on an

eighteenth century statistical device. Henderson gives no indication as to how he arrived at his figure. The stent rolls that survive for this period present a pattern of comparative stability. In 1576 a stent was taken up from the burgesses of guild for the repair of the parish kirk.¹³ In all 318 merchants contributed, a figure close to the approximate number of freemen suggested above.¹⁴ By 1592 there were 518 taxable inhabitants in the burgh, on this occasion including craftsmen,¹⁵ although by 1608 this had fallen to 551.¹⁶ When the 1407 stent roll, with its 331 taxable citizens, is placed against these figures it may be questioned if there was much of a population increase in Aberdeen during these years. Whereas Edinburgh's population doubled in the century after 1540,¹⁷ Aberdeen's could only have risen by a third at the outside and the actual rate of increase may have been significantly smaller. In such a society the ties of kinship and family loyalty acquired a profundity and institutional expression of remarkable intensity. At the death of James V Aberdeen presented a profile of a relatively small, increasingly close-knit and relatively static society, secure in its isolation and confident in its conservatism. It was just such a society that was most vulnerable to pressure for religious changes which questioned so many of the values for which it stood.

A contemporary observer, the French traveller Jean de Beaugué, said of the burgh in 1549,

Aberdeen is a rich and handsome town, inhabited by an excellent people, and is situated on the sea-shore. It is not a good roadstead, but its harbour is very safe and easy for ships to make were it not for the entrance which is narrow. (18)

Despite its narrow neck the harbour of Aberdeen was the centre of a flourishing maritime trade. The main commercial links were with the Low Countries, the Baltic and Scandinavia. Aberdeen merchants were

even to be found in Icelandic waters.¹⁹ With the trade came cultural and religious influences evident in the architecture of King's college and the Aberdeen foundations of the Franciscans and the Dominicans. The Dominican province in Scotland under the guidance of an Aberdeen friar, John Adamson, had accepted the reform of the order generated by the Dominican Congregation of Holland.²⁰ In 1469 an Observantine Franciscan friary had been founded in Aberdeen on the initiative of one of the burgesses.²¹ The Scottish province of the Observantines had been born from the Cologne vicariate of the order which comprehended much of the Low Countries and part of northern Germany.²² Many of the founding fathers of the Scottish province came from this area bringing with them the piety and theological outlook of the Devotio Moderna and the Rhineland mystics. German influences are also visible in popular spirituality; in the parish kirk an altar dedicated to the three kings was established, devotion to the Magi was particularly associated with Cologne which claimed to possess their relics.²³ The Flemish and German connection not only informed Catholic theology and practice, it also contributed to the growth of Protestantism. In 1525 James V had warned the east coast burghs to guard against the importing of heretical books from the Protestant lands across the North Sea. Thus the commercial contacts between Aberdeen and Europe were paralleled by a busy trade in the academic and ecclesiastical market. Links were forged not only between Danzig, Dieppe and Veere but also between King's college and the university towns of Cologne, Louvain and Paris. Aberdeen was a definite part of the northern European cultural and intellectual commonwealth, the currents of opinion, academic and otherwise, emanating from across the seas were at least as strong as those stemming from the south and west of Scotland.

Aberdeen's position by the sea between the Dee and the Don, at the head of a geographically well-defined region, made it a true regional capital with access to a large hinterland. The commercial monopoly of the burgh extended throughout the sherrifdom of Aberdeen and was bordered by the neighbouring liberties of the royal burghs of Banff to the north and Montrose to the south. Effectively its area of influence extended over a wider area since for major foreign trade the royal burghs of the north-eastern coastline were dependent on the larger resources of the Aberdeen merchants to support their trading ventures.²⁴ Aberdeen also possessed considerable prestige as the social and cultural capital of a large province. Its position and status made it the focus of judicial activity in the region and a natural administrative centre. It was imperative for any royal lieutenant in the north to control Aberdeen if his authority were to be taken seriously. Although the burgh was a distinct community with a political and economic life of its own it was not totally divorced from external influences. It was perennially vulnerable to forces outside its control, the interruption of trading contacts by war, the expansionist interests of local gentry and nobility and the vagaries of royal patronage. By keeping a balance between all of these potentially conflicting forces the burgesses of Aberdeen hoped to retain their distinctness and independence whilst recognising the interdependence of town and country, centre and locality.

The familiar hierarchical pyramid of wealth and status evident in many early modern towns was also seen in Aberdeen.²⁵ The social pyramid rested on a broad base and rose to a sharply tapering apex. However, the hereditary principle that reigned so inflexibly in Aberdeen ensured that upward mobility within the structure was closely controlled. The peak of the Aberdeen social pyramid was not regularly

broken off, neither was the composition of the oligarchy that maintained control of the town regularly changing.²⁶ There was considerable immobility, even stagnation, within burgh society. As the sixteenth century progressed Aberdeen became a less open society, its privileged class less willing to admit newcomers qualified by wealth, if not by heredity, to share power commensurate with their status. In effect by the end of the sixteenth century the oligarchy who had managed the town for over a century was showing all the signs of an aristocracy in decline, inbreeding, intolerance and immutability.

Throughout the sixteenth century the government of the burgh was exclusively vested in the hands of the merchant guild. Indeed the acts of parliament of 1469 and 1474 relating to the conduct of burgh elections confirmed a dominance that the burgesses of guild had already achieved in the town.²⁷ The representatives of the craftsmen were allowed a voice in the election of the provost and officers of the town but it was the guild which chose the council. Moreover, successive councils took full advantage of the acts of parliament to establish themselves as a self-perpetuating oligarchy excluding completely any representation of the craftsmen on the council.²⁸ As a result the idea of the 'community' of the burgh had been applied in an increasingly narrow sense, by 1441 it was clear that it was being related solely to the members of the merchant guild.²⁹ Real power was concentrated in an even smaller group of about a dozen merchant dynasties, all closely related by marriage and long-term family association, who often maintained seats on the council for centuries. In 1661 Gordon of Rothiemay gave a catalogue of those who 'oftentymes doe againe attayne to the offices and honors which ther predicessors bare'.³⁰ The same names Chalmers, Menzies, Cullens and Rutherfords crop up throughout the sixteenth century in the council

lists of the town. In some ways burgh society resembled a series of concentric circles, it was possible to enjoy considerable mobility within one's own circle but difficult to move from one to the other. It was almost impossible to penetrate to the town council, the charmed circle in which legislative and executive power was concentrated. At the heart of the council stood the Menzies family who formed the central link in an exceedingly complex chain of power, kinship and patronage.

The Menzies had arrived in the north-east from Perthshire towards the beginning of the fifteenth century, just before their more eminent noble counter-parts the Gordons, a Gilbert Menzies is recorded as provost of the burgh in 1423.³¹ During the course of the next century the Menzies, by administrative skill, astute political manouevring and a judicious scheme of alliance-building, were to emerge as the premier family in Aberdeen, rather as the Gordons were to do in the region as a whole. However, the Menzies did not come to exert a firm grip on the provostship of the burgh until the end of the fifteenth century, before that they were simply one component part of the oligarchy. Their rise to power was based on the defence of customary privilege rooted in antiquity and having the force of law. One pillar of this policy was the exclusion of local nobles and lairds from interference in the internal affairs of the burgh. The Menzies emerged, with the fervour of an arriviste, as defenders of the burgh's traditional policy. Their defence was expressed not so much in opposition to oligarchy as the identification of urban aristocrats with rural aristocrats. They wished to re-draw the boundary between town and country, a distinction which had become progressively blurred throughout the fifteenth century, and which was to be seriously challenged in the middle of the sixteenth by the greatest of the local nobles, the fourth earl of Huntly.³²

Between 1450 and 1600 the burgh of Aberdeen was the focus of consistent attempts by local landed families to extend their influence into the urban community. The register of admissions to the town's freedom show that most of the local lairds' families were represented there. Younger sons of the Irvines of Drum, Leslie of Balquhain and the Forbes of Corsindae, Pitsligo and Brux rubbed shoulders with the sons of old-established Aberdeen families. The movement of the lairds into the burgh was accompanied by a drift of the burgesses into the country. From the end of the fourteenth century the burgesses of Aberdeen had been acquiring land outside the town.³³ During the next century this movement gathered pace with the Scottish merchants as a social group buying their way into landed society.³⁴ By the middle of the sixteenth century many of the burgesses in the inner circle of Aberdeen's government had territorial designations after their family names, as with the Lumsdens of Clova, the Chalmers of Cults, the Rutherfords of Rubislaw and, most famous of all, the Menzies of Findon and Pitfoddels.³⁵ Such estates represented an investment of excess capital as well as a means of gaining social prestige. Landed wealth also offered economic advantage in the possession of raw materials for export in the form of hides, wool and salmon on which so much of the wealth of Aberdeen was based. Landed estates could be gained by purchase or marriage, with the latter often being the more economical option. Gilbert Menzies of Findon, the real founder of the Menzies fortunes, took great care to build up the landed wealth of his family by marrying his sons and grandsons to wealthy heiresses. His eldest son, Thomas, was married to the daughter of Alexander Reid of Pitfoddels, a former provost and the owner of a sizeable estate beside the Dee.³⁶ Gilbert's grandson, Master Thomas, was married by a similar arrangement to the heiress of

the Ogilvie laird of Durne in Banffshire.³⁷ Gilbert himself was married to Marjorie Chalmers, the daughter of the laird of Murtle on Deeside.³⁸

The links between the wealthy burgesses and the local landed families were consolidated by inter-marriage. The lairds did not appear to look askance at marrying their sons or daughters to the offspring of wealthy burgesses. In this way the Rutherfords were related to the Leslie of Balquhain and the Collisons to the Leslie of Wardres, the Setons of Meldrum and the Irvines of Drum.³⁹ If it was becoming more difficult at the end of the century to distinguish families like the Setons of Fyvie, the Kerrs of Cessford and the Scotts of Buccleugh, from those of the older earldoms, it was becoming increasingly difficult by the middle of the century to distinguish the wealthy merchants of Aberdeen with their country estates from the lairds and minor nobility.⁴⁰ So it was possible even for the Menzies to be connected by marriage with the Keiths of Troup and the Forbes of Pitsligo and, by the last third of the sixteenth century, to be bound into the Gordons of Haddo, the Irvines of Drum and through them associated with such powerful men as the earl of Huntly and the Earl Marischal.⁴¹ Because of these kinship ties conflict between burgess and laird was often less a class dispute than a family argument. Neither was such conflict necessarily drawn in terms of superior versus inferior. The burgesses did not always regard themselves as inferior to the local gentry, indeed the process of 'gentrification' of the burgesses, expressed in the imitation of the life-style and patterns of consumption of the lairds, threatened to erode the distinctive sense of burgh community and rob it of its independence. The increasing identification of outlook between burgess and laird posed a serious threat to the burgh and led to a protracted struggle between successive earls of Huntly and their gentry clientage on the one hand, and

the merchant dynasties on the other. In this contest the Menzies family, rather than acting as Gordon collaborators, appear as defenders of the rights and privileges of the independent burgh.

The Menzies began their long association with the office of provost as opponents of a narrow form of oligarchical government with too close ties with the landed families of the hinterland. The focus of their initial attack was Sir John Rutherford of Tarland, eleven times provost of Aberdeen, who seems to have envisaged his office as the perquisite of a small group of families who would each hold it in rotation. Some discontent with this system had been expressed as early as 1486 by some sections of burgh opinion and in that year the king wrote to the council ordering it to choose the burgh officers wisely and well and avoid the 'gret vexacioun and tribule' that customarily took place at election time. The opposition to Rutherford was not strong enough to prevent his re-election, though vocal enough to present a complaint to the privy council which alleged that he had been promoted to office: 'be electioun of feu simpill persons his kynnismen', and that he was a 'masterful oppressour of the liegis, ande for his oppressione ther may nay merchante live within the burgh'. David Menzies seemed to have acted as spokesman for the opposition and although a special council meeting was summoned to discuss the matter it was decided that Menzies had no authority to raise the matter and the charge was unfounded. Apart from Rutherford's wealth and prosperity which promoted a certain kind of envy, the burgesses, chiefly the merchants, were worried at his association with the Gordons and their clientage. Rutherford was himself married to a daughter of Leslie of Balquhain.⁴² The battle of Sauchieburn and the murder of the king created some turbulence in Aberdeen and at the Michaelmas elections of 1488 Rutherford was succeeded

as provost by his rival and critic David Menzies.⁴³ The association of the former provost with the earl of Huntly, together with James III's avowed support for him in the face of attack from the merchants, had made Rutherford a liability rather than an asset to a burgh anxious at what the reign of James IV might bring. Rutherford's response to an attempt to save his position was to sign a bond of manrent with the earl of Huntly in 1490, anticipating the action of the Menzies family when they were faced with a similar threat to their hegemony in the burgh a century later.⁴⁴

The Menzies came to power with the definite object of restoring burgh identity and prestige, and the firm aim of excluding the lairds from undue interference in burgh affairs. During his first terms of office Gilbert Menzies of Findon encouraged the re-vitalising of the pageants and festivals which had marked the high-points of the burgh year.⁴⁵ Chief amongst these was the town's celebration of St Nicholas their patron, a celebration which fostered the welfare and strengthened the corporate identity of the community.⁴⁶ Menzies support for civic ceremonies went together with a determination to stress the independence and organic unity of the burgh community with which he wished his party to be associated. Gilbert Menzies held the provost's chair twenty-three times between 1505 and 1536: in that year he was succeeded by his son. However, the provostship had not been confirmed in Menzies hands until 1525, and that was in response to the short-lived provostship of John Collison, a man in the mould of Sir John Rutherford whom the Menzies had helped to supplant. The terms of the dispute between Collison and some of the leading burgesses of the town suggest the existence of a town and a country party in the burgh, parties which often existed in uneasy coalition but which occasionally broke into serious

conflicts of interest which threatened the stability of the burgh commonwealth.

During the 1520s the burgh's relations with the local lairds markedly deteriorated, this deterioration was partially conditioned by the circumstances of the royal minority. In July 1521 complaints were made by the provost against the attacks of the Forbes family on the burgh.⁴⁷ During these attacks on the town the provost, Gilbert Menzies, had been the target of particular hostility. For his protection the council agreed to his borrowing the town's artillery so that he might defend his friends, servants and goods. However, this generous offer was also made in consideration of all of his actions 'in defence of the said toune and thar fredoms in all tyme to cum'.⁴⁸ Thus Menzies became strongly associated with the cause of burgh independence, any increase of gentry involvement in the town could only be secured by easing Menzies out of office. An attempt was made in 1521 to depose Menzies but it came to nothing largely because the country party were losing ground in the burgh. It was not until 1524 that the combined effects of the death of the third earl of Huntly and the exile of the Duke of Albany created a climate of sufficient uncertainty to allow the election of a prominent member of the country party, John Collison. Whereas the Menzies had attempted to control the influence of local landed families Collison not only supported it but laboured to extend it.

Collison was a good illustration of how far the process of 'gentrification' had gone in the burgh, and what the consequences of such a process were for the urban community. He was not a representative of the 'auld bluid of the toun'.⁴⁹ His father, David Collison, did not have a distinguished Aberdeen pedigree, having become a burgess by marriage in 1449.⁵⁰ He engaged in a successful business career and

was able to marry his son John into the landed gentry, allying himself with Leslie of Wardres.⁵¹ John was able to consolidate his links with the local gentry by marrying his own daughter into the Irvines of Drum and his son into the family of Seton of Meldrum.⁵² His Aberdeen roots were not very deep, and whatever identification he may have experienced with burgh traditions were outweighed by kinship loyalty and gentrified ambitions. In September 1525 moves were made by the country party to re-elect him to the provost's chair, the ensuing dispute revealed how positively the burgh construed its freedom and how confident it was in its independence.

Just before the Michaelmas election of 1525 a meeting of the burgesses specified that no gentleman who lived outside the burgh, and even though a burgess, should be allowed to vote or a voice in the election proceedings unless he paid taxes and fulfilled all of the duties and responsibilities of an inhabitant of the town. This was a direct challenge to the local lairds, and their opposition to it was expressed by Collison and his confederates who claimed that 'gentill men of landwart, sic as the lairds of Drum, Wardes, Balquhain, and Meldrum, suld have thair wottis'.⁵³ The lairds' response to their firm exclusion from influence in the burgh took the traditional form of an armed raid on the town in which a number of citizens lost their lives. Such a reaction was a confession of failure on the part of the lairds and an illustration of how the traditional equilibrium of the relationship between town and country had broken down. The limits of the lairds' power in Aberdeen were seen in the comparatively small opportunities to interfere in burgh affairs offered by the annual elections. Such intervention was directed towards securing a provost who would exercise power in association with their interests. The result of this policy

was a total fragmentation of any notion of consensus which may have existed hitherto. The intervention of the lairds in Aberdeen politics was essentially conservative in intention, emphasising the burgh's role as a component part of local society whose interests would be subordinate to the natural leaders of that society, the nobles and the gentry. The lairds were assuming an identification of view between town and country which, if it was there at all, was no longer expressed according to the traditional pattern. Aberdeen was attempting to secure an increased freedom of action, its burgesses, and especially its ambitious and wealthy merchant oligarchy, were beginning to move out of the locality to claim a place and an influence in central government. In effect they were engaging in a parallel process to that of the lairds; they were claiming an independent role and function in the national polity commensurate with their power and status as tenants-in-chief of the crown.

The increasing power and assurance of Aberdeen under the direction of the Menzies family is quite clear from its triumph over the local aristocracy. Throughout the struggle the watchword of the burgesses was their status as 'the kingis frie burgesses', a status which had been defended by their ancestors 'frie of thraldome and all thirlith',⁵⁴ despite their having been often subject to invasion by the local gentry. The contest with the local lairds was part of the general process by which burgesses throughout the country were laying hold of every aspect of burgh life and concentrating the direction of burgh institutions in their own hands.⁵⁵ In the decades after the major victory of 1525 the burgesses consolidated their exclusion of the local gentry from the burgh, making it clear that any future association of town and country would be based on the town's own terms.

Despite the set-back of the 1525 election the local gentry were to make various efforts to re-establish lost ground and gain an interest in the landed endowments of the town. In 1530 the town refused to continue the pension granted to Lord Forbes for his protection of their rich salmon fishing grounds because 'thai that suld be keipars of the saym, are principale distroyars and fischars of thame in undew tyme'.⁵⁶ When Forbes wrote to the town demanding his pension the tone of the council's reply gave a clear demonstration of how burgh-magnate relations were to function. Aberdeen was only interested in lordship if it could provide a service, the weaker the burgh the more likely it was to seek such lordship. In 1530 Aberdeen's refusal to pay Forbes his pension stemmed from his failure to fulfil his part of the contract with the town. When Lord Forbes resorted to the usual raid on the town, which led to a fierce street-fight with a number of casualties, the council was sufficiently wealthy and self-confident to bring a case before the Justiciary court. The verdict went in favour of the town with an instruction from the king that the burgh should be left unmolested in future by the Forbes.⁵⁷ Both the events of 1525 and those of 1530 occurred during the minority of the fourth earl of Huntly when the house of Gordon was deprived of an effective head, and the alleged defence offered to the burgh by the bond of manrent of 1463 was ineffective.⁵⁸ In the resulting vacuum the town did not attempt to insulate itself from the unrestrained ambitions of the local gentry by allying with the most powerful of them, it managed to steer a remarkably independent course. If the search for 'good lords' by the burgh was a sign of declining power and confidence, then a rebuff to a powerful landed family must be seen as an indication of increasing assurance.⁵⁹ In the 1530s Aberdeen was in a position to dispense with lordship and to preserve a

significant degree of independence.

In 1538 the burgh's independent role was once more put to the test in another dispute with the Forbes. The council showed a keen sense of local political realities and the precariousness of its own freedom by refusing to grant the lands of Ardlair to the Forbes family. The lands in question had been gifted to the town by the bishop of Aberdeen for the support of the bridge over the Dee.⁶⁰ One of the causes of the continual friction between the Forbes and the Gordons and their clientage stemmed from the territorial claustrophobia the Forbes endured through being surrounded by Gordon land-holdings.⁶¹ The expiry of the tacks of Ardlair gave the Forbes the opportunity to increase their holdings and obtain a marginal improvement in security. In effect the lands of the Church and the burghs offered the only possibility of expansion in an area dominated by the Gordons. The Forbes case was presented to the council by one of their family agents, bailie Patrick Forbes.⁶² Despite his pleadings the council refused to grant the lands to the Forbes precisely because of their strategic position between the lands of the Leslies and their rivals and enemies the Forbes. Any grant to one family would inevitably alienate the other and threaten the shaky neutrality of the town. What is significant about the town's stand against the Forbes is not so much that it should have been made but that it should have been successful, giving a further example of the security which the burgh enjoyed in the closing years of the reign of James V.

The pattern of Aberdeen's relations with the local gentry echoed its dealings with the earl of Huntly, dealings which were not always those of feudal patron and client. The bond of manrent signed with Huntly by the burgh in 1463 may have been defensive in intention but

it did not bind them to exclusive dependence on him, they were still free to look for allies and associates elsewhere among the nobility. All through the fifteenth century, and even into the sixteenth, other prominent noble and gentry families like the earl of Erroll, the Earl Marischal and Lord Forbes appear connected with burgh affairs.⁶³ As late as 1560 the burgh was still held responsible for paying a pension due to the earl of Crawford who had earlier performed useful services for the town.⁶⁴ It was in Aberdeen's interests to recognize the pre-eminence of Gordon power in the north-east by entering into the bond of manrent in 1463, but the council was careful enough to ensure that the association was to endure for ten years only, they had no desire to become a permanent Gordon fief. The agreement was put to the test some months after its ratification when the earl of Huntly asked the town for help in his dispute with the earl of Ross. The town expressed sympathy with Huntly's difficulties but politely and firmly declined his request.⁶⁵ Again in 1519, during the provostship of Gilbert Menzies of Findon the third earl of Huntly asked for assistance with the siege of Dunrobin Castle. Once more the town expressed its concern and offered a composition for license to remain at home from the siege, attempting to content the earl with a loan of three pieces of artillery; further aid was refused.⁶⁶ Similarly in 1544 Huntly asked for a force of one hundred men from Aberdeen to aid him in an expedition against Donald of the Isles, the burgh offered fifty or sixty saying it was too poor to send more.⁶⁷ Even when he was apparently secure in his tenure of the provostship of the burgh (1545-1547), Huntly had to be careful to avoid alienating the burgesses by seeming to act in an arbitrary or high-handed fashion. During those years the council registers record few of his direct interventions in the town's business,

those that do appear are framed in discreet terms. In 1546 the earl requested the council to remit a fine of twenty pounds which a James Manchan had incurred through tapping wine illegally. The earl felt obliged to explain that this was the last time he would make such a request and that if the town felt unable to grant it then he would pay the fine himself; this was hardly the attitude of an autocrat.⁶⁸ Beyond these occasional requests the earl's overt interference in burgh affairs was minimal; like the lairds he was forced to work through party and faction to bring the country into the town.

By the end of the 1540s the burgh had effectively established its authority and was a distinct element in the politics of the region. It had defended its liberties and privileges and succeeded in emphasising the bounds between town and country. During this struggle the cause of burgh independence had become identified with the extended rule of the Menzies family, which brought stability and continuity in government and fostered a strong sense of oligarchical solidarity. In a society in which the force of personality counted for so much, the political skills and diplomatic abilities of a Gilbert Menzies of Findon, or 'Banison Gib' as he was known because of his gift of eloquence, were at a premium.⁶⁹ His long period in office allowed him unique access to the burgh's store of patronage with which he could reward supporters and win allies. A consistent policy of positioning Menzies placemen, such as John Kennedy the depute town clerk, in key offices ensured that the Menzies' hold on the government of the burgh grew daily more firm. Moreover, experience had shown that whereas when the earl of Huntly was a minor the burgh often profited, during a royal minority the coherence of the established order was threatened and the town often became a pawn in a game of aristocratic faction. It is against this

background of aristocratic factionalism, the expansionism of the gentry and increased burgess confidence that the early years of the earl of Arran's governorship were played out. It was during this period that the Menzies, as representative of the gentrified townsmen, began to press for a greater role in central government. It was this move out of the burgh, and out of the region, which was to place a severe strain on the traditional arrangement of local politics and lead to the temporary eclipse of the Menzies family by the earl of Huntly.

The earl of Arran's position at the beginning of 1543 has been estimated as one of considerable weakness.⁷⁰ He was faced with the difficulties of fending off an English invasion and the absorption of Scotland into the French interest. Militarily the country was weak, politically it was dominated by a number of rival aristocratic interests. At the head of the powerful ecclesiastical lobby was Cardinal Beaton, determined to fight the implantation of Protestantism and conformity with England. In order to defend his governorship he needed allies in the localities who would render his administration effective. However, his chief anxiety was to secure the money necessary to finance his government and provide the necessary reserves of profit and patronage to entice others to co-operate with him in it.

Of the £26,000 Scots delivered to Arran from James V's royal treasure in early 1543 only six hundred and sixteen pounds eleven shillings and three pence remained in the boxes in August of the same year.⁷¹ Although during the last years of James V the expenses of the royal household had been rising gradually, in the year 1539-1540 alone household expenditure had risen to £19,229 Scots, and revenue was not keeping pace with expenditure, such a steep rise can only be accounted for by peculation and patronage on the part of the governor.⁷²

He was forced to turn, as James V had done, to sources other than the royal property to underwrite his budget.⁷³ The reversal of the forfeitures of lord Glamis and the earl of Angus at the parliament of March 1543, together with the return to Mary of Guise of her jointure lands, involved a further drop in revenue and an increased strain on the governor's diminishing resources.⁷⁴ At the same March parliament Arran's plea that he was 'at mair sumteous expens' than James V fell on deaf ears.⁷⁵ He was granted only the revenues of the abbeys held in commendam by the illegitimate sone of James V, with the additional benefit of being guaranteed immunity from accounting for them in time to come. In his extremity he was thrown back on the profits he could derive from his control of royal justice and the disposition of offices, his control of the great seal giving him considerable power in the distribution of patronage.⁷⁶ His needs were manifold and his reserves of money declining by the day, he was required to support a large family and kindred as well as to placate and conciliate a number of angry nobles who were only too willing to consider his deposition. In such circumstances it is not surprising that there should have been great stress laid on the collection and efficient administration of the royal revenues.

Traditionally it had been notoriously difficult to administer the royal finances during a minority. An attempt had been made to deal with this problem during the minority of James V by ensuring that the first two comptrollers to hold office were men who had held it before and who were experienced in the collection and administration of revenue; Arran deliberately chose not to follow this pattern.⁷⁷ He moved outside the circle of Edinburgh merchants from whose ranks many of the previous comptrollers had been drawn, and chose Thomas Menzies

of Pitfoddels to serve in that office,⁷⁸ although Menzies had no experience to qualify him for such a role in central government. His appointment to the comptrollership appears to have been part of Arran's plan to build up a party of his own to staff his administration. Leslie refers to a major re-shuffle of royal officials soon after Arran took office.⁷⁹ The governor seems to have followed a definite policy of filling key offices with his own placemen who were totally dependent on him for preferment and who could be removed at will. This policy was also dictated by the limited choice of posts he could offer to his associates. Some of them, such as the custumarship of Dundee, were of little value and less prestige.⁸⁰ Yet if the choice of candidates for apparently unimportant offices followed a consistent pattern their cumulative effect could prompt a shift in traditional government policy, and even pose a threat to the aristocracy in the regions.

Although the offices Arran was able to offer may have held no attraction for the magnates they were of some value to the merchants and gentry who were looking to extend their influence into central government. The comptrollership was ample reward for Menzies and he made good use of the opportunities it afforded. The comptroller managed the income from the royal estates which involved him in:

the placing of all receavers, challmerlaines, and uther officers, the taking of a cautione for their fidelitie, the censuring and punishing them for absues and disposing them of thair offices, passing of all infeftments of the propertie, and the managing of the haill affaires pertaining and belonging thereto. (81)

In addition he held the office of custumar-general,⁸² granting leases on his own authority,⁸³ and managing the royal artillery.⁸⁴ The comptroller also had the right to appoint the custumars of the burghs to ensure efficient collection of revenues.⁸⁵ The chamberlains of the

more important crown estates were under his jurisdiction and it was his duty to see to the provisioning of the king's ships.⁸⁶ Aside from all of this the comptroller oversaw the royal household and maintained discipline within it. For all of these responsibilities, with the attendant strain of more or less permanent residence at court, the comptroller received the annual salary of 500 merks.⁸⁷ This was little enough in itself, but the disadvantages were outweighed by the benefits conveyed by a position at court with its attendant prestige. Menzies' office was of considerable importance during a minority and offered a significant amount of patronage through appointment to offices, provisioning of ships and the nomination of customars. He used his power on at least two occasions to favour relatives and associates, had he been in office longer he may have found ways to continue this practice.

One of Thomas Menzies' first appointments was his father, Gilbert Menzies of Findon, to the office of customar of Aberdeen in April 1543.⁸⁸ In 1542 the Aberdeen customs revenue amounted to £433 Scots and from this the customar was entitled to receive four pence in the pound.⁸⁹ The real advantage of the customarship was that the customar had to estimate the quantities of the goods to be exported and assess the amount of duty payable.⁹⁰ The appointment was potentially lucrative and the opportunities for profit very great;⁹¹ the Menzies were to retain it for several decades. In rewarding members of his own family Menzies was following on a smaller scale the same policy as his master the governor, loyalty and service had its price in both cases.⁹²

The comptroller's responsibility for provisioning the king's ships and the supervision of the royal artillery allowed Thomas Menzies to exercise patronage in other ways. The Exchequer Rolls for 1543 record an unusual payment made to a certain burghess of Aberdeen for the

purchase of gunpowder in Denmark.⁹³ The merchant in question had been commissioned by Menzies to undertake the expedition. In choosing Andrew Buk, Menzies acted out of a combination of prudence and self-interest. Buk was a well-known ship-owner and mariner, one of his vessels was recorded as a prize lying in the Thames in 1545. The ship had actually been captured some time previously, it was registered at 400 tons and with a crew of twenty-two men.⁹⁴ Buk was therefore a man of considerable resources as well as nautical skill. He also seems to have been an expert on artillery; during the crisis of 1542 he had been appointed by the council to be the 'gyder' of Aberdeen's guns under the direction of Andrew Menzies and Alexander Nicholson.⁹⁵ He was a sensible choice for such an undertaking from a professional point of view being well-versed in seamanship and ordinance.

The provost also had personal associations with Buk which were to grow closer as the years went by. He was a near neighbour of Buk since both lived in the Castlegate, one of the better areas of the town.⁹⁶ Eventually Menzies consolidated his commercial association with Buk by marrying his daughter Matilda to him, the union was sealed twice over with the marriage of Robert, Thomas's son, to Buk's daughter.⁹⁷ Such patronage of family and business associates was not simple nepotism but a practical way of securing trustworthy collaborators prepared to work in the interests of sound administration. Menzies' kinship and political network, rooted deep in local society, was of great value to Arran in allowing him a measure of independence from undue reliance on the ships and capital of the Edinburgh merchants. Buk's expedition to Europe ended in the capture of his ship by the Dutch which denied Arran the arms designed to aid him in the anticipated struggle with the opponents of his English alliance.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, it showed the benefits

which might accrue by working through the Aberdeen merchant community rather than relying totally on Edinburgh.

Arran was very conscious that the bulk of his power was concentrated in Lanarkshire and the neighbouring shires. When in 1543 Henry VIII offered to make him ruler of Scotland beyond the Forth, Arran refused saying that 'all his land and living lay on this side of the Forth, (the south) which he would not gladly change for any living beyond the Forth'.⁹⁹ Alliance with Thomas Menzies gave him a valuable pocket of influence in the territory of the earl of Huntly, his rival and opponent, as well as giving him control of a highly important burgh. Aberdeen was a potential weakspot for Arran. Its good roadstead and easily defended harbour could enable any local nobleman who controlled it to maintain his own system of communications with the continent, and use the port as an entry point for men and supplies.¹⁰⁰ Throughout 1543 there were rumours that Aberdeen was to be the target of a French expeditionary force dispatched to depose the governor.¹⁰¹ It was also popularly suspected that both Mary of Guise and the young queen were to be kidnapped and carried to Europe on French ships sailing from Aberdeen.¹⁰² This particular rumour was strong enough to prompt the governor to increase the guard around the queen at Linlithgow, and even to consider going there himself until the danger had subsided.¹⁰³ Aberdeen was a constant threat to Arran if it rested in any other hands than his own or his agent's. Conversely, controlled by the governor it was a danger and an irritant to the earl of Huntly who saw it as a threat to his hegemony in the north-east. By establishing direct relations with the burgh of Aberdeen through the provost and ignoring the earl of Huntly, Arran was by-passing the traditional royal agent in the region and finding new ways of executing policy. However, the increasing

tension over who dominated Aberdeen was more than a conflict between central and local government, it was also a dynastic quarrel. Governor he may have been but Arran was still a Hamilton and as such had no place in the north-east which was solid Gordon country. In the ensuing dispute the earl of Huntly stood, as he and his successors were often to do in the sixteenth century, for the maintenance of the traditional polity of the realm based on respect for the territorial integrity of the magnates.

Ironically it was the success of the burgesses of Aberdeen, directed by the Menzies, in asserting the burgh's independence and limiting the interference of the gentry in the electoral process that involved them in the growing rift between Arran and Huntly. Part of the Menzies platform had been the defence of the integrity of the provost's office; they realised that its subversion would entail the loss of the town's liberty 'for quhair the heid is ontrune the memberis may nocht guidely resist'.¹⁰⁴ However, by allowing so much power and influence to be concentrated in the hands of Menzies their defender, the citizens of Aberdeen were uniquely vulnerable to any alliance he should make on their behalf. Thomas Menzies' growing involvement with Arran throughout 1543 was viewed with some alarm by his colleagues on the council not only because it threatened to detach Aberdeen from the political structures of its hinterland, but also because Arran's pro-English policy involved a religious dimension which challenged the basic conservative piety of the town.

When constructing his new party of government talent, ambition and a certain amount of regional power were important factors influencing Arran's choice of candidates, another was the degree of sympathy for the English alliance and a corresponding openness to religious refor-

mation. Thomas Menzies appears to have stood high in the governor's esteem throughout 1543, and to have displayed the required qualities. As early as March 1543 Menzies was nominated to the council deputed to advise the governor by parliament.¹⁰⁵ In June of the same year he was entrusted with the delicate mission of gaining custody of the young James Stewart as part of Arran's policy of keeping control of the late king's heirs. Unfortunately he was thwarted in the case of James Stewart since the boy was kidnapped by the Douglasses before Menzies could execute the commission.¹⁰⁶ The intensity of the association between Menzies and Arran was clearly seen at the ratification of the treaty of Greenwich in August 1543. Menzies, along with the Earl Marischal, Kirkcaldy of Grange and other English sympathisers signed the document at Holyrood and joined the English ambassador at a celebratory mass to mark the event; the Cardinal and the earl of Huntly with the pro-French party stayed away.¹⁰⁷

In later years Thomas Menzies and his family were to be linked with the conservative cause in politics and religion, but during Arran's governorship the provost's views were more radical in character. The March parliament of 1543 which had confirmed Menzies as a member of the governor's council also passed an act permitting the lieges to possess the scriptures in the vernacular.¹⁰⁸ Shortly afterwards the effects of Arran's newly-acquired protestant sympathies were expressed institutionally in Aberdeen. On 13 May 1543 the provost and council of Aberdeen agreed to the public support of two disaffected Dominican friars, John Roger and Walter Thomson, for their

leill and trew lawtaful service to be done in preching
and teching of the tre Word of God, and thair daylie
prearis for the estait of the lord governouris grace,
the commont weill of this realme, and of this guid
toun. (109)

Both men were members of a group of renegade friars whom Arran had absorbed into his service as chaplains and used as agents to stir up reforming opinion in the country. By 1543 Roger's views had already become well known and he had been a target of Cardinal Beaton's disapproval.¹¹⁰ Roger operated within the area of Angus and the Mearns where he was able to preach to and enjoy the support of Protestant noblemen like the seventh lord Glamis.¹¹¹ His preaching career in Aberdeen did not last long and he may have been one of the first victims of Arran's reconciliation with Cardinal Beaton and the ecclesiastical party at the end of 1543. Knox records that soon afterwards he was found at the foot of the walls of St Andrews castle with his neck broken, presumably flung from the top at the orders of the cardinal.¹¹² There are no further references to Thomson and the remainder of his career is obscure.

Neither Roger nor Thomson could have counted on a welcome from their Dominican brethren in Aberdeen. They certainly did not lodge in the priory and were forced to maintain their own establishment.¹¹³ Their exclusion from the priory reveals a certain division of opinion amongst the Scottish Dominicans. The prior of Black friars in 1543 was Andrew McNeill who had held the post more or less continuously since 1517.¹¹⁴ He remained in office until 1546 and his own attitude to the Reformation may be gauged from his actions as prior of Stirling in 1559. He refused to leave the house and in the end had to be forcibly expelled. His name does not appear amongst those receiving pensions from the thirds of benefices after 1560. The procurator of the Aberdeen priory was also a defender of Catholicism and hostile to religious change. John Black held office as procurator until 1550 when he became attached to the court of Mary of Guise. He later became chaplain to Archbishop Hamilton and was to participate in the archbishop's efforts to promote

the internal reform of Catholicism.¹¹⁵ He continued his apologetic activities after 1560, engaging in debate with John Willock and even acting as chaplain to Queen Mary after her return from France. Indeed it may have been his close involvement with the queen that led to his murder on the streets of Edinburgh in 1566.¹¹⁶ If Roger and Thomson could not count on any friends amongst their Dominican brethren, neither could they expect a welcome from the Aberdonians at large. Their presence in the town was not in response to a spontaneous upsurge of reforming zeal amongst the inhabitants, it was solely due to the political connexion between the provost and the governor, a symbol of the loyalty and commitment of the former to the foreign policy of the latter.

Further evidence of Menzies' involvement with the Protestant pro-English lobby associated with the governor appears in a remission granted in 1544 to Thomas Menzies and thirty others for contravening the acts of parliament 'about those who dispute about Holy Scripture, or hold opinions, or read any books against the said acts'.¹¹⁷ Menzies had not only taken active steps to impose the governor's religious policies on Aberdeen, he had also associated himself with a vocal body of Protestant opinion which included the Earl Marischal, Norman Leslie, the master of Rothes, George Meldrum of Fyvie, Alexander Fraser of Philorth and Alexander Wishart of Pittaro. As a result he and his supporters found themselves in direct opposition to the earl of Huntly who was acting in close alliance with Cardinal Beaton and the ecclesiastical party. This sequence of events raised grave questions about the relationship which is often posited between the earls of Huntly and the Menzies family since in this particular case patron and client were working directly against each other. In the event Menzies was to find

himself in a particularly exposed position since, having hitched his star to that of the governor and alienated the earl of Huntly, he was at the mercy of Arran's volatile opportunism. The events of the latter half of 1543 unfolded against the background of increasing ecclesiastical and magnatial opposition to the governor, opposition which had its local expression in growing disenchantment with Menzies' rule in Aberdeen. National and local politics had thus become inextricably linked with a challenge to the authority of central government being paralleled by a threat to its agents in the regions.

Arran's remarkable volte face and reconciliation with Cardinal Beaton, which involved an abandonment of the English marriage in September of 1543, left some of his former allies open to the attacks of their enemies. Throughout 1543 the earl of Huntly had worked consistently along with the cardinal to undermine Arran's authority and oppose the alliance with England. The events of September 1543 gave him the opportunity to begin the restoration of his position in the burgh of Aberdeen which had suffered a severe set-back during the governor's brief flirtation with Protestantism. It seems to have come as something of a surprise to Huntly that he could no longer count on the burgesses of Aberdeen to support him in at least some of his undertakings. In July 1543, having joined forces with Beaton, Lennox, Argyll and Bothwell, Huntly marched on Linlithgow to take possession of the young queen.¹¹⁸ On such an expedition Huntly could have expected to have been supported not only by his gentry affinity but also by a contingent of men from Aberdeen. In August 1543 the council registers record a reply made by the burgesses to a request from Huntly for a force to engage in

... actionis concerning the common weil and liberallitie of this realme, and weil of our maistres the quenis grace in hir les aige. (119)

Obviously such an expedition would not have involved any good for the governor. In their reply the council acknowledged the special place that Huntly had always occupied in relation to Aberdeen, but gave him to understand that he might no longer rely on their services. The burgh had been generally weakened by the war, but it had also received a charge from the governor to furnish him with men and materials and they felt obliged to answer his demand. In effect Arran had got to Aberdeen before Huntly and eased the Gordons out of their pride of place in the burgh. The burgh's refusal to supply Huntly with troops was made in the absence of Thomas Menzies, and therefore cannot be put down to his dominant influence over the council. The refusal actually reflects the burgh's understanding of its own relationship to legitimate government authority. Throughout the sixteenth century the council was to be exceptionally wary of disobeying or directly challenging the government in power, even if this involved them in a dispute with the earl of Huntly. The fundamental principle of burgh government was that legitimate authority must be obeyed despite the consequences such obedience might involve in local politics.

There is evidence that rumblings of discontent were beginning to be heard in the burgh by the second half of 1543. After the ratification of the treaties of Greenwich a wave of anti-English feeling had swept over the country which threatened to engulf the governor and his servants alike. There were signs in Edinburgh and some of the other royal burghs that Arran's religious policies were not appreciated either. In August 1543 there had been a vigorous display of conservatism in Edinburgh when a group of armed men swept into the council chamber flourishing the Banner of the Holy Ghost.¹²⁰ Something like Edinburgh's state of turmoil seems to have prevailed in Aberdeen since the uncertainties of events there drew the provost home from his responsibilities at the court at the end

of August. On his arrival Menzies convened an extraordinary meeting of the whole town which was intended to serve as a demonstration of satisfaction at the Arran-Menzies alliance. In his speech to the assembled burgesses Menzies asked

gif thai wald fortify and menteyne his autorite
 aganis certane conspiratouris, and to wyt thair
 myndis in that behalf, sua that he may defend thame
 and thair liberteis and fredoms in tyme cuming. (121)

Such was a clear demand to the burgesses that they should declare themselves openly either for or against Arran and naturally meant that their loyalty to Menzies would be under scrutiny. Faced with such a stark choice it is perhaps not surprising that all 'in ane voice' agreed to give their allegiance to the provost and the governor. Menzies, making assurance double sure, then took legal instruments on it.

Menzies responded to the challenge to his authority by these unnamed conspirators by identifying himself once more with the burgh's liberties and freedoms. An indication that the opposition to Arran and his agent in Aberdeen stemmed from the dissatisfied members of the 'country' party in alliance with Huntly, angry at the displacement of his own influence on the burgh, is provided in the precautions the council ordered to be taken for the security of the town. On the same day that they repledged their loyalty to the Menzies the council gave orders that the town's defences should be strengthened. Provision was made for the manitenance of a nightly watch, the ports were repaired and locked and the entrances to the town were locked with chains and booms. The council ordered that all of these precautions were to be taken quickly since they expected an imminent attack by the Gordons in an attempt to re-establish their position in the town.¹²² In effect the expected attack was delayed and when it did come it was focussed on the Menzies as representatives of the anti-Gordon lobby. What may have saved the town from a

raid by the local gentry was Arran's remarkable volte-face and return to doctrinal orthodoxy.

Arran's reconciliation with the cardinal in September 1543 presented a grave threat to his former collaborators.¹²³ Very early on in his governorship he had asserted his independence and disregard for the traditional relationships that prevailed between the centre and the locality. He often appeared to act in an arbitrary and high-handed fashion ignoring the counsel of his fellow-nobles and depriving them of their right to a voice in government. As early as March 1543 a convocation of Arran's opponents, including the earl of Huntly, insisted that the governor should be counselled by the magnates and churchmen.¹²⁴ The demand went unheeded since it was repeated at a meeting between the governor's party and the cardinal at Kirkliston in July 1543, when the opposition to Arran was growing in intensity.¹²⁵ One of the central concerns of the opposition to Arran was that he should cease to be counselled by the 'private persons' who had influenced him unduly until then, numbered amongst these was Thomas Menzies the comptroller. The accommodation Arran reached with Beaton was a re-assertion of the values of traditional government and represented the governor's abandonment of his policy of direct interference in the affairs of the localities. His attempts to create a Hamilton party of government with agents throughout had temporarily failed and the victims of that failure were those who had associated themselves publicly with his anglophile programme.

Almost immediately after the new alliance was forged between Beaton and Arran a purge was mounted against the governor's former confederates. A new council was chosen to advise him, and Menzies forfeited his comptrollership whilst Kirkcaldy ended his term as treasurer and Balnavis was disgraced.¹²⁶ The process continued once the new government was firmly

established. At the December parliament many of the Protestant sympathisers on the council, Angus, Lennox, Glencairn and Marischal, were dismissed and moves were initiated against religious dissidents.¹²⁷

It was clear that the cardinal intended to make an example of those who had associated themselves too enthusiastically with Arran's Protestantising policies. At the end of September Arran was dragged off to Dundee in the cardinal's train when those who had been responsible for religious rioting and attacks on the religious houses were arrested along with Lords Gray and Rothes and Henry Balnavis.¹²⁸ This was a sinister development as far as Menzies' fate was concerned since he, perhaps more than any other burgh official, had initiated reforming policies in his burgh. The moves against the reformers prompted many Protestants to leave the country and the French ambassador reported a fall-off in religious rioting.¹²⁹ The severity of Beaton's visitation of Dundee was the reason ascribed by Grimani, the papal legate, for his quiet ride through Leith on his journey to Edinburgh, the population felt overawed by reports of the cardinal's work in Dundee and later in Perth.¹³⁰ Under these circumstances it was questionable if the Menzies domination of Aberdeen could withstand a sustained attack on it from the Gordons and the Church, with the governor standing by reluctant to intervene. In January 1544 Thomas Menzies, possibly casting about for allies to help him during the forthcoming storm, acted as cautioner for the earl of Erroll should the marriage between his son and heir and the daughter of the Earl Marischal not take place.¹³¹

A direct consequence of the policies of the new regime was the launching of Henry VIII's rough wooing in May 1544. The outbreak of hostilities with England, and the continuing threat from south of the border, was to influence burgh life in Aberdeen until the end of the

1540s. Even before Hertford began his campaign, Aberdeen ordered its master of artillery to have the guns cleaned and ready to resist the English, whilst all through April and May further precautionary measures were taken to defend the town.¹³² Throughout the following years, and regularly during the next decades the burgesses were haunted by the fear of an English invasion. At the end of April 1543 preparations were made to block the harbour because the council had heard 'be suir adverteisment' that the English were coming.¹³³ Later in May they were so concerned for the safety of the burgh archives should the town be invested that they ordered the charter kist to be stored in a secure and secret place until the emergency was over.¹³⁴

In time of external threat the burgh tended to unite in resistance behind the notion of the common weal. One of the burgesses, Alexander Rutherford, a wealthy merchant, was prepared to supply the deficiency of iron available for the town's defence by surrendering four of his great iron 'chandlaris' for the purpose.¹³⁵ Iron seems to have been in perennial short supply in the town since even in 1555 the town ordered the master of kirk work to use the 'girt irne kirk styill to be applyit to the irne wark necessar of the tolbuith'.¹³⁶ Not all of the burgesses were as public-spirited during the crisis as Alexander Rutherford. Throughout these years the council issued regular injunctions to those living to landward to return to the burgh and bear their share of responsibility for its defence and well-being.¹³⁷ The frequency of such injunctions illustrates how widespread was the practice of holding land outside the burgh and how useful such holdings could be as refuges from responsibility and danger both foreign, in the shape of invasion, and domestic, in the shape of internal political dissension.

The rupture of trading relations between Aberdeen and the conti-

nent appears to have been severe during these years. Foreign names seldom appear in the council registers and there are few references to foreign ships. The rare mention of alien ships is usually with reference to the resources it provided for the defence of the town. Thus in August 1547 a French ship in the harbour was stripped of its artillery for the protection of the burgh against the English.¹³⁸ Similarly in 1545 a native of Hamburg is recorded as having borne some responsibility for the town's artillery.¹³⁹ The presence of the Hamburg man in the town reflects a growing concern for the maintenance of links with Germany and the Baltic ports. The burgesses' concern for good relations occasionally took concrete forms. In October 1549 the council remitted part of the fine incurred by the captain of a German ship and his crew for 'luf and kindnes of the toune of Hamburgh and the inhabitantis thair- of, and for thair sake allanerlie'.¹⁴⁰ Regular trading contacts did not spring up again for some years after the outbreak of war with England; even when hostilities were dying down, the journey was still perilous. In June and July 1548 a sizeable group of Aberdeen merchants set sail for Danzig to repair damage done during the war. The perils of the journey were reflected in the council's injunction that the merchants in question should have paid their contribution to the burgh stent before being allowed to leave. The English invasion also raised questions about the reliability of Aberdeen, especially given the pronounced English sympathies of its provost. Such doubts prompted the earl of Huntly to attempt to re-assert his position in the burgh and to regain some of his former influence in the direction of its affairs. Despite its fear of invasion by the enemy, and the economic hardship it faced on account of the war, the burgh proved surprisingly resistant to the earl's initiative and chose to re-affirm its loyalty to the Menzies and their alliance

with the governor.

The internal affairs of Aberdeen mirrored the unsettled state of the country during the early stages of the war with England. Discontent with the incompetence and duplicity of the governor increased throughout 1544, and attempts to displace him culminated in the summer with an attempt to depose him and replace him by Mary of Guise.¹⁴¹ Efforts to outmanoeuvre and dislodge Arran also involved attacks on his agents in the regions, so closely were national and local politics intertwined. Thomas Menzies was to be the focus of exactly the same process as his patron the governor, one of the leaders of the opposition in both cases being the earl of Huntly. The common concern binding the opposition together both in the country and in the burgh was the untrustworthiness of both Menzies and Arran, and their involvement in the pro-English Protestantising moves of 1543. The prolonged absences from his own territory forced on Huntly by the rough wooing increased the pressure on him to solve the problem of Aberdeen. He could not allow it to remain unchallenged under Menzies domination since it represented an obvious target for English attacks and a dangerous threat to his rear. He therefore hoped to intimidate the burgesses by a strong show of force into obeying his appointed agents in the town, thereby robbing the Menzies of their authority and, in effect, establishing a rival administration.

The events of 1544 demonstrate that Aberdeen's relationship to Huntly was not one of vassal to lord or even patron to client. If his power had counted for much in the burgh, and if the Menzies family had consistently acted as his willing agents ensuring the submission of the town to his purposes, then he would not have had to cast about desperately in 1544 for allies to form a rival administration. In the event the burgh refused utterly to obey the officers he chose for them and refused to be deluded into accepting them by Huntly's appeal to the current

emergency. In May 1544 he wrote to the town, allegedly in reply to the concerns expressed by some of the inhabitants at the dangers they faced from the English, assuring them that their fears were groundless and ordering them to obey his 'cousingis and servitouris' John Gordon, Henry Irvine, Alexander Rutherford and William Rolland and 'nane uderis'.¹⁴² The town council regarded this command as an unwarranted infringement of their liberties and privileges and reminded the earl that they were bound to obey their provost 'to quohn we ar sworne'. They did make some conciliatory gesture to the earl by offering to remove the provost and bailies from office if they offended the earl in any way. However, they were quite aware that such an offer could not be acted upon since the earl would be without the necessary degree of support within the town to ensure that the policies he favoured were actually effected. It is significant that the provost was not present at the meeting which rejected the officers appointed by the earl. Menzies was still strong enough to muster support even when the force of his personality was not evident.¹⁴³

Since resort to intimidation had not accomplished Huntly's purpose, his agents in the town then set about canvassing support for an attempt to depose the Menzies at election time in October. This attempt miscarried and provided the Menzies with a useful opportunity to strengthen their position and demonstrate the degree of support they enjoyed amongst the oligarchy that administered the town. At the head court on 6 October 1544 Thomas Menzies mounted a pre-emptive attack on his opponents by offering to resign. In his speech to the burgesses he acknowledged that opposition to him existed in the burgh and that some ill-feeling had been expressed at his being elected unopposed to the provostship at successive annual elections. He therefore offered to stand down

as provost and suggested that David Anderson might succeed him. He also asked pardon for not having exercised the office of provost as he should, perhaps a reference to the prolonged absences from the town necessitated by his appointment to the comptrollership. Faced with a stark choice between rule by the Menzies, which though risky, at least provided some assurance that burgh privilege would be defended, and rule by the earl of Huntly, the burgesses chose the Menzies once more. In effect the election was a vote of confidence in the Menzies and a total rejection of the country party. Menzies' son, Gilbert, was chosen as the first bailie, Andrew Menzies the second, and David Anderson, Menzies' associate, the third and Alexander Rutherford, an opposition member, was the fourth. Although John Gordon lodged a protest 'for himself and his adherents' against the election on the grounds that there was great 'enmitie and discord' amongst the inhabitants, Menzies took office unchallenged.¹⁴³ Gordon's appeal that the result of the voting should be scrutinised by a third party acting as a competent judge fell on deaf ears. It was an obvious plea for the intervention of the earl of Huntly, yet the earl did not enjoy sufficient support in the burgh to make his opinions respected and his will obeyed.

Further evidence of Huntly's weak position in the burgh was seen in an attempted putsch against the governor which aimed at installing Mary of Guise in his place. In November 1544 Mary, with the strong support of the earl of Huntly summoned a parliament in order to force some of her supporters out into the open. Arran, not to be outdone, immediately summoned a rival parliament which was to meet before Mary's and proclaimed that all who attended the dowager's parliament would be declared traitors.¹⁴⁴ Both parliaments were to act as tests of strength for the rival parties, and were designed to reveal how widespread was the support

for each in the localities. It was therefore inevitable that the issue of representation at both should be keenly contested in Aberdeen. If, as it is often held, the earl of Huntly's influence had been paramount in the burgh it would have been expected to see Aberdeen represented at the dowager's parliament. In fact Thomas Menzies represented the burgh at the governor's parliament in Edinburgh, although his presence there had not been uncontested at home.¹⁴⁵

On 31 October 1544 the 'haill toun' of Aberdeen had been summoned to the Tolbooth by Gilbert Menzies, one of the bailies. The provost was not present and Gilbert, his son, may have been acting for him in his absence. The burgesses were faced with the perplexing problem of two summonses to the rival parliaments in November. The summons to the dowager's parliament was accompanied by a letter from Huntly requiring the burgh to send their delegates to the assembly at Stirling. The bailies were at a loss as to how to respond and remitted the matter to a sub-committee including John Gordon, Huntly's spokesman in the town. A majority of the council agreed to support the governor's parliament and chose three delegates to attend it. Very skillfully they named Gordon as one of the delegates, thus facing him with a complex clash of loyalties. Should the Stirling parliament not meet or fall apart, then Gordon would be faced with a charge of rebellion. If he refused to attend the parliament at Edinburgh as a delegate of the burgh, then he would have shown where his true loyalties lay and that he actually represented external interests, preferring to serve the local nobility and gentry rather than his fellow burgesses. He solved his problem by agreeing to send commissioners to the parliament at Edinburgh, but only with the advice of the dowager's lords at Stirling.¹⁴⁶ The whole dispute reveals that there was a serious difference of opinion on the

council. The council was not simply divided down the middle with one group supporting Huntly and the queen dowager with the other backing Arran. Certainly both bodies of opinion were represented amongst the councillors, but there was also a sizeable group who were not definitely committed to either party. The only interests they were prepared to serve were those of the burgh. Whichever party appeared to offer the most in terms of security and stability would have their allegiance. The composition of this 'neutral' party was clear in the dispute over representation at the rival parliaments; David Anderson, William Holland, Master Robert Lumsden and John Rutherford refused to agree to sending commissioners to either parliament. In the end they were outvoted since Menzies was at Edinburgh and the dowager's party were disappointed.¹⁴⁶

The whole episode shows the existence of different shades of opinion in the burgh and the comparatively low level of Gordon power. The earl of Huntly had been defied once more and the Menzies vindicated; however, the way ahead was clearer for the earl to establish his influence in the burgh. Intimidation had not worked but persuasion might succeed. Any attempt to re-establish some trace of Gordon influence in Aberdeen would have to take account of the various factions and bodies of opinion represented on the council. It was incumbent upon the earl to work with these various groups in order to arrive at a consensus favourable to his assumption of authority. The dispute over the representation of the burgh at the rival parliaments of November 1544 disclosed the existence of a group of burgesses who were not wholeheartedly committed to the continuation of Menzies power. The earl's purpose was therefore best served by attempting to win this influential cadre to his allegiance and to construct a burgh administration around them. During the next year his efforts in Aberdeen were directed to this end with marked success, since at the elections of 1545 he was elected to the office of provost.

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CHAPTER TWO

Trade, Territory and Magnatial Power.

The chief problem facing the earl of Huntly in Aberdeen in 1545 was the same as that which faced the Protestant party in the years after 1560. This problem revolved round the achievement of influence on the town council, which was the key to power and gave access to the administrative machinery of the burgh. Such access was made more difficult for him by the contemporary understanding of the nature of the 'burgh community'. Accompanying the restriction of the idea of community to the free burgesses of guild had been the development of a community within a community. Community life came to be dominated by a small group of families closely bound together by personal and business ties, and monopolising wealth, power and prestige in the town. The oligarchy which dominated the town's affairs was a coalition of patriarchal units headed by a paternal figure who acted as the representative of the kin-group in relation to the formal structures of government and society.¹ The function of the head of the family was to protect and develop the interests of his family, their dependants and associates. This was best achieved by gaining a voice on the council and exercising the responsibilities of government.

The heads of the merchant dynasties acquired unique power and authority in a system in which one of the prime determining values was loyalty to 'the name'.² In effect the same values visible in noble and gentry society were transposed to an urban setting; the strong pull of dynastic interests were eventually consolidated and found expression in Aberdeen in the 'abominable race of Menzies'.³ The dominance thus achieved was directed towards the determined regulation of every aspect of social life. In formulating its policies the oligarchy was obviously motivated by a desire to preserve its own privilege. However, self-interest was not its sole driving force.

The laws and regulations of the burgh had a positive effect in creating a sense of community, defining its limits and re-affirming its autonomous character. The challenge facing the earl of Huntly in 1545 was how to undermine oligarchical solidarity without appearing to subvert the independence of the burgh, a cause with which the Menzies and their clients had become closely identified.

The earl of Huntly's task was made more difficult by a number of related factors. The structure of power in the burgh faithfully mirrored economic realities; concentration of substantial wealth went together with the disposition of equally substantial power, the same men dealt in both. The merchants who composed the government of the town were all involved in overseas trade and derived varying proportions of their wealth from it. Wealth was a necessity for office-bearers since the charges of civic administration made heavy demands on the councillors' pockets. The corollary of this was the expectation of some reward or compensation from burgh service; speculation and corruption came to be seen as a natural part of the administrative life of the burgh.⁴

The earliest stent roll to survive for this period dates from 1576 and shows a significant disparity of wealth amongst the merchant guild.⁵ It highlights the concentration of resources amongst a small group of merchants at the top end of the scale. In all seven per cent of the merchants paid twenty-five per cent of the tax levied on the guild. Within this group a smaller number paid over forty shillings in tax, not surprisingly perhaps three of these were members of the provost's family whereas the remainder were all heads of merchant families who had frequently served as bailies. A fifth of the merchants listed in the stent roll paid only one merk in tax, the lowest

contribution possible. The main economic initiative, as well as the bulk of the burgh's resources, rested in the hands of a few families. Their commercial enterprises sheltered and fostered the economic fortunes of a great many lesser trades and craftsmen in the burgh.⁶ It was in the interests of each component part of burgh society to minimise the opportunities for dissent and friction. Factionalism was strictly controlled and confined to the council, where it could be safely expressed behind closed doors. The stability and continuity of the burgh demanded that the integrity of the council be preserved, if that unity was broken and the basis of burgh consensus was lost, then the burgh became an 'open' society very much at risk. It was of the utmost importance to preserve the role of the council as the sole representative body of the community and to maintain its function as the prime mediator between the inhabitants of the burgh and any external power or interest.

One of the ways in which the sense of burgh community was expressed was in terms derived from the language of kinship and family association. The burgh community was seen as a pattern of extended family relationships, its identity being somehow reflected in the status and life-style of the oligarchy which governed it. Over the centuries this oligarchy had assumed more and more responsibility not only for government but for most of the institutions of burgh life. Pride in the community, and pride of place generally may be seen in the lavish endowment of the parish kirk, a concern for the maintenance of the town's grammar school and hospital as well as its religious houses.⁷ The imprint of the ruling families was evident in the foundation of altars, the endowment of the church and the appointment of schoolmasters. Power also brought serious responsibilities

which were exercised in the support and maintenance of burgh servants, thus the leading burgesses took it in turns to support the choristers of St Nicholas' church. Whilst even after the Reformation the council was concerned to fulfil its responsibilities by providing for former Catholic clergy who had served it in the past.⁸ The endowment of churches and the state of building in the burgh in the first quarter of the sixteenth century was not simply a sign of the confidence of the merchants of the time it was a demonstration of how they saw their role in urban society.⁹ They were bound to display the characteristics of good lordship in defending the autonomy of the community. This involved not only the exercise of patronage but also the display of the appropriate degree of magnificence. Thomas Menzies' stone house proved an important talking-point in the dispute with the Gordons in 1544, but its real significance lay in its being an illustration of that degree of display necessary for a successful merchant prince jealous of the privileges of his burgh.¹⁰

The emphasis on kinship loyalties within the burgh was also indispensable if burgh government was to function satisfactorily. The higher up the social scale an individual rose the more important the notion of kinship and the extended family became.¹¹ If such an individual became heavily involved in the administrative life of the burgh it was necessary for him to recruit reliable officers and collaborators to make his authority effective; inevitably the family was the natural ally in the business of government. Kinship became more not less important in Aberdeen as the sixteenth century progressed and the institutions which had formerly created and fostered a sense of communal solidarity became subject to confessional strains. The importance of kinship ties also had a negative effect in that it

promoted an introspective and exclusive attitude to government rendering it less open to dynamic new elements in society which were seeking ways to express their ambitions.

The pattern of alliance-building amongst the merchant oligarchy in Aberdeen was decisively influenced by marriage contracts. In the shifting schemes of economic interest the female partner was very often the one element of stability. A high proportion of Aberdeen ladies in the upper strata of burgh society were married at least twice, if not three times; a rich widow was unlikely to remain unclaimed for long. In this regard the Menzies family was fortunate in being blessed with considerable progeny whom, when adequately endowed could be disposed in marriage to maximum political and economic advantage. Women could therefore attain to considerable influence bringing many divergent interests together. Such influence is perhaps reflected in the comparatively large number of women who were arraigned for non-conformity before the kirk session in 1574-1575.¹² Whereas in previous generations marriage might serve as a bond linking separate interest-groups in a relationship designed to serve a common end, the development of the 'mixed marriage', a Catholic wife and Protestant husband or children, created a rogue element in the midst of the established order with which the burgh did not have the social, or perhaps even psychological equipment to deal.¹³

The overlap between the various communities of merchant guild, town council and kinship group was consolidated by the widespread acceptance of the hereditary principle. Entry to the merchant guild was largely determined by descent and lineage, with preference being given to the sons of guild burgesses. Of the 270 burgesses granted their freedom between 1543 and 1560 ninety-three were admitted simply in

virtue of being the son of a burghess or marrying the daughter of a burghess.¹⁴ A bias towards heredity was also visible on the council where the prevailing pattern was for members to sit until their deaths whereupon they would be succeeded by their sons. Once on the council a burghess was sure that his posterity would have a voice in perpetuity in the deliberations of the community. A seat on the council was therefore a sign of dynastic achievement as well as of commercial success and political ability. Moreover, the remarkable longevity of many of Aberdeen's burghesses ensured a degree of stability and continuity in the ranks of the council. When Thomas Buk succeeded his father, Andrew, on the council in 1582 he continued a succession which had begun in 1561 when Andrew was first nominated to that body.¹⁵ It is perhaps significant that Thomas Buk should have been one of the strongest defenders of oligarchical rule and conciliar privilege during the disputes with the crafts in 1591.¹⁶

An incidental result of this stress on kinship was the entrenchment of a strong pattern of conservatism and resistance to change in the burgh. The council tended to become an almost entirely self-regulating body acting with only the slightest reference to the rest of the community. Consequently public office became 'privatised', with council meetings never notified to the rest of the town, with business strictly controlled, and even meetings of the council being held outside the Tolbooth in the houses of bailies or prominent councillors.¹⁷ On occasion the council met in the 'gryt back chamber' of the provost's house emphasising the connection between burgh government and the Menzies family.¹⁸ It was difficult in these circumstances to see what an autonomous, self-sufficient body like the Aberdeen merchant oligarchy, who had just won a series of battles against local

gentry interference, stood to gain from an association with the earl of Huntly. However, on this occasion, as in 1560, the issues were to be heavily complicated by the dynamics of national and international politics.

The English invasion, the dynastic ambitions of the earl of Arran and the attempts of Cardinal Beaton and his supporters to stamp out pressure for religious reform formed the background to events in Aberdeen between the years 1545 and 1547. During this period the burgh found itself caught between the pressures of rival magnatial politics. Growing divisions between the governor and his associates threatened to sweep away those who might prove covert allies to Hertford and thereby challenge the integrity of the state and Catholicism. Master John Gordon, Huntly's agent in Aberdeen, gave warning that the cardinal's heresy-hunting policies might be extended to Aberdeen at the beginning of December 1544. On Huntly's orders Gordon, as lieutenant-depute, initiated the prosecution of two burgesses who had been involved in the 'hinging of the image of Saint Francis'.¹⁹ By presenting them to the bailies for punishment Gordon put pressure on the administration which had previously aided Arran's Protestantising policies. The respite given to Thomas Menzies in June 1544 for possessing heretical books was timely but might not have saved him from the attentions of the orthodox.²⁰ Religion was to be a useful test of political loyalties as well as a useful weapon in the campaign to displace potential subversives.

Once the initial shock of the English invasion had been absorbed the battle-lines within the kingdom were more clearly drawn. The rival parliaments of November 1544 proved to be useful indicators of the relative strengths of the various parties striving to seize the

political initiative. In fact the fragile unity of the governor's opponents was not a strong enough force to dislodge him. The reconciliation achieved between Arran and his opponents at the December parliament of 1544 was expressed locally in a compromise agreed between the earl of Huntly and Thomas Menzies over who should govern Aberdeen. The December parliament marked a decisive shift in Arran's policy towards the localities. In order to consolidate a united front against the English Arran was forced to recognise the position of the great landed earls and return to the traditional royal policy of rule through the magnates. Arran conceded Huntly's pre-eminence in the north and thereby changed his relationship with the Menzies. The role of Aberdeen as Huntly's regional capital was recognised by his election as provost in January 1545.²¹ Without the support of central government it was impossible for the Menzies and their associates to resist the powerful local pressure of the earl of Huntly. On 20 December 1544 the provostship was declared vacant, and on the same day Huntly was admitted to the freedom of the burgh so that he might hold office as provost.²² The council also agreed to consult him about who should be provost if he did not wish it for himself.²³ At the January head court Menzies officially surrendered his office and Huntly was immediately elected to succeed him. However, since the nation was at war and Huntly's duties required him to be frequently absent from the burgh, it was decided that Menzies should act as his deputy.²⁴

In many ways the accommodation reached between Menzies and Huntly seemed sensible and offered hopes of fruitful co-operation between burgess and magnate. At the same time it acknowledged the Menzies network of patronage and authority whilst allowing it to stand

unchallenged. The key difference to Menzies power under the terms of this arrangement was that he no longer held it on his own account or with the direct support of the governor, he exercised it simply as an agent of the earl of Huntly. Menzies' removal from office appears to have been one of the conciliatory gestures Arran was forced to make at the parliament of 1544. The relationship prevailing between Menzies and the earl of Huntly was, from henceforth, to be a simple transposition of the traditional pattern of relationship between centre and locality to a regional setting. The earl did not as yet have the power to enforce his will in Aberdeen, he therefore employed a local agent who possessed it to act as his representative. Such an arrangement was satisfactory provided the English invasion was contained and Menzies proved trustworthy. If either condition failed, and the earl was able to build up an alternative party of government, then the survival of the Menzies regime was less certain.

The association between Huntly and Menzies endured throughout 1545. The victory at Ancrum in February 1545 encouraged Scottish resistance and increased morale. The savagery and lack of discrimination in Hertford's invasions of Scotland did much to alienate the former members of the English party.²⁵ By October 1545 the government felt strong enough to take firm action against the Scots who had collaborated with England.²⁶ Although Menzies did not quite fall into the category of 'assured' Scots, his former Anglophile opinions did not count in his favour. At the same time Arran was busy gaining supporters for his project to marry off his son to Queen Mary. He was prepared to strike various bargains to achieve this end, and one such arrangement, involving the complete eclipse of the Menzies family was concluded with the earl of Huntly.²⁷

On 30 September 1545, five days before the Michaelmas elections in Aberdeen, one of the governor's messengers was commissioned to ride to the earl of Huntly with letters concerning the provost of Aberdeen. On the same page of the exchequer rolls mention is made of another journey made on the governor's behalf by a messenger who was commanded to 'receive' the provost of Aberdeen's house.²⁸ These oblique references may signal the governor's abandonment of his former client as part of his campaign of making 'greit offeris' and speaking 'fair vordis' to secure the marriage of his son with the young queen.²⁹ The October elections in Aberdeen were a disaster for the Menzies family and they were completely removed from power. The thoroughness of the operation requires some explanation and suggests that the earl of Huntly had been largely successful in building up an alternative party of government in the burgh.

When Huntly began his moves to take over the administration of the town in 1544, he turned for assistance to the 'shadow' government, which was composed of former opponents of the Menzies family and those who were tied to the Gordons by kinship or patronage. In May 1544 he had attempted to force his 'cousingis and servitouris', Master John Gordon, Henry Irvine, Alexander Rutherford and William Rolland on the burgh as agents of his government.³⁰ It was to them he turned once more in the following year to form the nucleus of his administration; in this he was following an established pattern. Whenever the town had passed over the Menzies family for the principal offices in the burgh, they had usually turned to members of the burghess aristocracy who had formerly been associated with that office themselves. Thus there was always an ancien regime waiting in the wings to take over from the arrivistes Menzies, who had pushed too

hard and too fast. Some of those who proved willing to co-operate with Huntly in 1545 were key members of this group; although the co-ordinator of Huntly's campaign for power, Master John Gordon, was a member of the earl's own kin.

Gordon could not have been described as the most moderate of characters and in choosing him the earl was committing himself to a fairly rough fight. Gordon had been active in the affairs of Aberdeen since the mid-1530s, and in 1541 he had held the office of bailie.³¹ His career had not always been peaceful. In 1537 he had been given a remission for the murder of James Lyon, one of the burgesses of Aberdeen, and the mutilation of one of the bailies. He had also been accused of attacking the provost and bailies in the execution of their duties.³² Gordon's credentials as an opponent of the Menzies family were established by his involvement in the murder of Andrew Menzies, for which he was arraigned in January 1546.³³ One of those who stood surety for him on that occasion was Henry Irvine, who was also to act for Huntly in the period 1544-1546.

Henry Irvine was a member of the laird of Drum's family. In 1535, taking advantage of a gap in the Menzies' occupation of the provostship, he had raised a summons before the Lords of Session to have a true audit made of the accounts of the common good of the burgh. His action was opposed by the majority of the council who appointed commissioners to appear for them. Irvine's action soon failed due to lack of support.³⁴ Irvine's involvement in Huntly's coup raised the spectre of gentry interference in the burgh and suggests that the earl's election in 1545 should be seen as the climax of the process of merger between town and country, a merger which the Menzies family had always been determined to resist. In Huntly's provostship

the local families appeared to secure finally the position in the burgh that they had been striving to consolidate during the previous fifty years.

Irvine was not the only burgess associated with the local lairds to throw in his lot with the Gordons. His colleague, Alexander Rutherford, also had links with the country party. Alexander was the son of Sir John Rutherford of Tarland, the great merchant prince and client of the third earl of Huntly. Through his mother Rutherford was also related to the Leslie of Balquhain.³⁵ His marriage to Margaret Collison, the daughter of that 'ambesowus proud man' John Collison the champion of the rights of the local lairds in the burgh, drew him more closely into association with the country party.³⁶ The ties of kinship binding the anti-Menzies faction were further strengthened by the marriage of Henry Irvine to Janet Collison, thus bringing the Collisons, the Irvines and the Rutherfords together in alliance with the Gordons.³⁷

It is significant that in later years when the burgh had escaped from the suzerainty of the Menzies that it should turn once more to the representatives of the 'auld blood' of the town for its provosts. In 1591 the council elected Alexander Rutherford, the great-grandson of Sir John, to the provostship; he was to hold the office twelve times between 1591 and 1614. Another of those to hold the provost's chair after the defeat of the Menzies, was Alexander Cullen, a descendant of the provost Cullen during whose term of office in 1535 Henry Irvine had raised the action concerning the burgh finances.³⁸ The Menzies did not totally dominate the burgh during these years, they presided over a coalition of opinions and interests which were always liable to fragment. The Menzies family was always liable to

suffer the effects of such disintegration. The conspiracy of national and international events in 1545 rendered them particularly vulnerable. At least half of Huntly's collaborators within the town in that year were involved in the country party. Huntly was well aware of the necessity of gaining allies amongst the burghesses. His immediate problem in governing the town lay in taking account of the firmly entrenched political and commercial relationships existing within it, and finding a point of access to the charmed circle of the merchant oligarchy. His excursion into burgh politics in 1545 brought him up sharp against the comparatively novel experience of facing inferiors in terms of rank and prestige who, at the same time, wielded considerable economic power which was fed by ambition and wealth.

The earl of Huntly also looked for support to those councillors who had refused to send commissioners to the rival parliaments of November 1544. Amongst these, William Rolland and Master Robert Lumsden had been prominent in opposition. Again kinship counted for much in the association between these two, since Lumsden had married into the Rolland family.³⁹ Lumsden was also an experienced administrator, having acted several times as stentmaster as well as being a notary by profession.⁴⁰ William Rolland had previously served the earl of Huntly as sheriff-depute of Aberdeen; he had also acted as stentmaster, collecting the taxes designed to support Huntly's expeditions against the Isles in January 1545.⁴¹ Huntly could therefore rely on the co-operation of experienced administrators, but his authority in the town also demanded reserves of patronage and domination of the town council, from which the Menzies influence needed to be purged.

The escalating war with England and the savage invasion of the south-east, together with co-ordinated rebellion in the west, actually facilitated Huntly's campaign against the Menzies.⁴² The legislation of the parliament of October 1545 was a good indication of anti-English sentiment in the country, and of the government's determination to move against those whose loyalty was in doubt.⁴³ The Menzies, deprived of Arran's support and vulnerable to the hostility of their fellow-burgesses through too close an association with Protestantism and England, could not have hoped to escape some challenge to their authority. Their crime was all the greater since they appeared to be guilty of that subordination of civic interests to dynastic ambition which had been the offence of many of those burgesses they had opposed in the past. Their collapse came rapidly and effectively at Michaelmas when the earl of Huntly demonstrated that he had learnt much from the tactics of the Aberdeen oligarchy when it came to elections.

The custom at elections was for the provost and bailies to be chosen by the whole community, however this was interpreted at the time. A few days later the councillors and office-bearers were chosen at a meeting of the guild court.⁴⁴ Elections appear to have been purely nominal in Aberdeen, since the leets were restricted to one set of names with only one candidate proposed for each office.⁴⁵ On Monday 4 October the earl of Huntly was re-elected provost of Aberdeen. Henry Irvine, Robert Lumsden, David Anderson and William Rolland, all of them Huntly supporters and drawn from the 'neutral' party of October 1544, were chosen as bailies;⁴⁶ for the first time in many years no member of the Menzies family appeared amongst the bailies. The comparative ease with which Huntly achieved his object

may have stemmed from Menzies' belief that he was to continue as the earl's deputy. However, by a piece of sharp-practice Huntly outflanked the former provost and pushed his associates off the council. Once the new provost and bailies had been elected they withdrew immediately, and secretly, to the Grey friars' kirk, a short distance from the council house, and there chose the new council.⁴⁷ They did not wait until the customary guild court which was to be held at the end of the week. Later on in the same day Irvine, Lumsden and Rolland, together with nine members of the new council, met in the council house and chose the officers. Huntly, having achieved his end, did not bother to remain for this meeting but withdrew, leaving his agents to govern in his name.⁴⁸

Huntly's manoeuvres at the October elections posed a serious threat, not only to the Menzies family but also to the contemporary understanding of the community of the burgh. The traditional association of the merchant guild with the ideology of community was broken by Huntly's action since the guild was excluded from exclusive participation in the electoral process. The appeal of Huntly's provostship was to the disaffected country party and to the unattached and ambitious burgesses who found themselves excluded from the Menzies clique, and therefore limited in the amount of authority they could aspire to. Had Huntly continued in office for any great length of time the structures of the burgh commonwealth might have been decisively altered. As it was, the opposition to Huntly's disregard for tradition was led by the erstwhile enemy of the local lairds, Thomas Menzies.

Menzies was joined in his protest by eleven others, including three members of his own family and, perhaps more significantly, Walter Hay, the deacon of the Hammermen.⁴⁹ Both men lodged strong protests

at the unconstitutional nature of Huntly's action; Menzies on behalf of his allies, and Hay on behalf of his craft. Huntly had achieved his object, but only at the expense of isolating the Menzies and turning them irrevocably against him and his agents. At the same time he alienated the town's leading goldsmith, along with the powerful and numerous Hammermen's craft. In the long run Huntly's victory in the 1545 elections proved a hollow triumph. It represented the extension of Gordon power into the heart of burgh administration, but it also proclaimed the failure of the policy of the use of executive power by the nobles through the agency of client burgess families. Huntly was forced to take control of the town himself because there was no other way his writ could run there. This calls into question the thesis that Gordon power over Aberdeen was exercised through senior members of the Menzies family consenting to act as puppet provosts.⁵⁰

The effect of Huntly's action was to polarise burgess opinion and to alienate those on whom he should have been relying to exercise his power. It took him two years to dislodge the Menzies family, and even then their eclipse was temporary rather than permanent. The earl's success could only have taken root if he had managed to exploit further the dissension that already existed within the burgess elite to build up his own network of patronage and privilege. Enduring success for the earl would have necessitated the construction of a new party closely bound in with his interests. The continued war with England, and the political and economic dislocation it brought with it, thwarted Huntly's designs and ensured that the Menzies would at some time return to power, and that they would be even stronger than before.

One of the keynotes of good lordship generally, was the regular presence of the magnate in his own territory. In order for seigneurial authority to be maintained in good order it had to be seen to be regularly exercised.⁵¹ The force of personality could often count as much as established institutions when it came to the business of government. Huntly's coup had been achieved largely through a blend of opportunism and strength of will; change of circumstances limited the value of the former, whilst the earl's military activity in the south negated the latter. In the 1546 elections Huntly was re-elected provost in his absence. However, the abiding influence of the Menzies family was clear since Thomas Menzies' son, Gilbert, was nominated to the bench of bailies, whilst Thomas himself, and two of his kinsmen, found places amongst the councillors. Of the four bailies who had served with Huntly in 1545 only David Anderson, the least offensive from the Menzies viewpoint,⁵² had been re-elected. The remaining three bailies Lumsden, Rolland and Irvine who had served in 1545, never held the office of bailie again. The 1546 elections represented a limited Menzies revival, but the town was still too much in awe of the earl of Huntly to restore them completely to favour.

The decisive event in the resurgence of the Menzies fortunes was the battle of Pinkie. Pinkie was fought on 10 September 1547; the elections in Aberdeen were held a few weeks later on 3 October.⁵³ The battle was not only a disaster for the country it was a major set-back for the earl of Huntly and his power in Aberdeen. Despite appearing in brave array in gilt and enamel armour on the field of Pinkie Huntly was captured and taken off into exile. Amongst those of his retainers left dead on the field was a contingent from Aberdeen,

including two of his chief agents in the burgh, Master John Gordon and William Rolland.⁵⁴ The Menzies were quick to fill the resulting vacuum, and swept back to power in 1547.⁵⁵ The increased English threat, and the loss of their provost, prompted a degree of co-operation between the rival factions in the burgh which might have been more difficult to achieve in time of peace. Huntly's captivity in England, and the demise of his two principal supports in the burgh, weakened the personal ties that bound his party together; it also deprived his allies of the security of his protection. Moreover, the English successes brought foreign investment of the town within the horizon of possibility. In such circumstances the election of Thomas Menzies, formerly a member of the anglophile party, appeared an attractive option, since it might afford some limited protection from enemy attack.

Throughout 1548 the earl of Huntly's own position was one of extreme difficulty and ambiguity. Somerset spent most of the year attempting to bully and cajole him into lending support for the English marriage and adding his name to a list of the protector's clients amongst the Scottish nobility.⁵⁶ In some ways the conditions which prevailed in the north-east during Huntly's captivity in England were similar to those of a Gordon minority. The established order of authority and obedience was threatened with dissolution in the absence of the lord. Under such conditions Aberdeen, fearing a resurgence of unchecked gentry interest in the burgh and intimidated by the country party, turned once more to the Menzies family who had always defended its interests in the past. The Menzies took full advantage of their position and anglophile reputation; as late as 1549 the provost's name was on a list of names of Scots with suspected English

sympathies which was forwarded to London.⁵⁷ Meanwhile Huntly's influence declined until he should be released; even then he was to be faced with regaining the considerable ground lost whilst in exile. Needless to say Huntly's captivity pleased the earl of Arran and his associates. With Huntly out of the way and Arran in an unchallenged position the Menzies family were able to lay a firm hold on burgh government, and turn their attention to the war which was to shape the history of the burgh for the next decade.

The dislocation caused by the English invasion to the life of the north-east was economic as well as political in character. The victory at Pinkie opened up much of the east coast to English armies, and by the spring of 1548 Somerset had secured possession of Haddington in the Lothians, as well as dominating the estuaries of the Forth and the Tay. Aberdeen was soon the only sizeable town on the east coast to be free from English influence. Somerset's determination to consolidate his hold on Scotland by the establishment of the equivalent of a 'pale' might also have encompassed Aberdeen.⁵⁸ Thus the sea, which had been the strength of the town's economy, became the chief threat to its security. Consequently the burgh was forced to endure a decline in trade whilst increasing the level of defence spending. Powder and artillery were purchased and work began on a blockhouse to protect the harbour.⁵⁹ The news of the investment of Dundee in December 1547 threw the citizens of Aberdeen into a panic,⁶⁰ and even in 1548 Odet de Selve warned the king of France of an impending assault on the burgh.⁶¹ This pattern of fear of invasion, declining revenue and rising burgh expenditure was to recur during succeeding years. It prompted the burgesses to take steps which may have depleted the common good and further entrenched the power of the oligarchy.

The prospect of economic hardship and commercial decline may have been one of the factors influencing Thomas Menzies' original support for the English connection. It has been pointed out that when James III was pursuing a policy of alliance with England there was a wave of anti-English feeling throughout the country. Only the merchants stood out against this tide since they were the ones who hoped to gain from a prolonged period of peace.⁶² Certainly war did not appear to be good for trade. In 1524 the custumar of Aberdeen received the remission of half of his tack duty for the salmon customs:

because on account of the wars ... between the realms neither the ships nor the merchants of the burgh of Aberdeen could sail.⁶³

Similarly when the burgh had refused to supply Huntly with men for his political schemes in the south in August 1543, they gave the following as one of their reasons:

the gryt skaith that we haf gottin beise, in tynsel of our men, geir, and schippis, and of this lang weir that we haf hed na chenge in merchandis, quhilk is our lewing....⁶⁴

Complaints were made even during time of peace of Scottish ships seized by English sailors; in war the risks were considerably increased.⁶⁵ However, for those who did venture out to sea the profits could be large. Money could be made from privateering and holding prisoners for ransom. As early as 1545 an English prisoner was boarding in the burgh with his captor, Thomas Branche.⁶⁶ Since Branche was one of the few burgesses known to have had Protestant sympathies at this time, this connection is a useful demonstration that to be Protestant was not necessarily to be pro-English.⁶⁷ However the council was not always happy at such profitable excursions into warfare. In 1546 the council, having an eye to good relations

once the war was over, publicly distanced itself from the privateering expedition of one of its citizens, Melchior Cullen. Cullen had set sail from Leith with the merchant marine of Flanders and Denmark as his targets.⁶⁸ His early death at Pinkie solved the council's problem for them.⁶⁹

Sometimes the cost of trade could be high in personal as well as economic terms. Andrew Buk, a prominent burgess and well-known sea captain, endured some time in captivity at the hands of the merchants of Hull. Buk had evaded paying his ransom by a timely escape from their custody; this did not prevent the merchants of Hull from sending a deputation to Aberdeen to ask for their money when the war was over.⁷⁰ Neither were Aberdeen merchants immune from attack during peace time. Master Thomas Menzies, the provost's second son, was kidnapped from a Scottish ship in Harwich roads and held in prison for some months in London in 1551. This particular incident gave his elder brother, Gilbert, the excuse to seize two ships from Whitby six years after the original attack, and hold them for ransom within his jurisdiction of Torry, just across the Dee from Aberdeen.⁷¹ Thus the war increased the merchant's opportunity for profit, but it also proportionately increased the risks; those who were prepared to take risks found themselves in a better position to face the associated aspect of international conflict, increased taxation.

Between January 1545 and September 1550 a total of twelve stents were listed in the council registers. All of these were imposed by central government in aid of the prosecution of the war, or national diplomatic activity. Between 1545 and 1548 the taxable inhabitants of Aberdeen were subject to an annual levy of something in the region of £200 to underwrite the war with the English.⁷² Unfortunately no

stent rolls survive for this period and it is therefore impossible to define the extent of the financially responsible community, or to discern how the various stents were distributed. The stent roll of 1576 gives an impression of the taxable merchant community: in all 318 names are listed.⁷³ The extent of the taxable population between the years 1545 and 1548 is unlikely to have been larger, and may well have been smaller. On at least two occasions the burgh found it difficult to raise the sum required to meet the levies of central government. In August 1548 the council ordered that those who refused to pay the stent of £240 for license to remain at home from the siege of Haddington, were to have their goods poinded and sold.⁷⁴ Part of this sum was still outstanding in 1550, when another tax was levied amounting to £340 for the siege of Broughty Castle.⁷⁵ In March 1550 the provost warned the town that a bill was coming from the treasurer's clerk for £200 representing the remainder of the sum demanded for siegeworks at Broughty Castle. The town seemed undismayed and disclaimed responsibility for the sum, claiming that it was the duty of the last stentmasters to pay.⁷⁶ The difficulties of collecting taxes perhaps account for the reluctance that was occasionally expressed by the burgesses when they were asked to act as stentmasters.⁷⁶

During these years, when the tax burden was increasing, there would appear to have been a shortage of cash-flow within the burgh: the common good was becoming seriously depleted. In 1548, in an attempt to build up their reserves, the council ordered that all of those who held tacks from the burgh should pay double grassums.⁷⁷ Some were reluctant to comply with this request since two months later the council was forced to order that those who had not paid the required

sums should have their lands re-set.⁷⁸ The burgh was obviously in urgent need of replenishing and could not supply all of the demands that were being made on it. The increased cost of the war, involving the building of the blockhouse, and the purchase of artillery, is evident from the council registers. The rupture in trading contacts with the continent and the military demands of the war had obviously taken their toll.

The conclusion of peace with England in 1550 forced the council to face squarely the problems of the previous years. In August 1550 Thomas Menzies presented the burgh accounts at the Exchequer in Edinburgh. The last time they had been audited was in April 1545. During that time the sum of the charge, together with the arrears had risen to £1,576 3/- 7½d.⁷⁹ Other burghs were also in arrears, but this was still a considerable sum for Aberdeen to find. Other burghs, like Dunbar and Lauder, could well claim to have been in the front line of the fighting in a way that Aberdeen could not.⁸⁰ The poverty of the common good was clearly seen when the burgh prepared to receive its first official visit from the governor in November 1550. In accordance with custom the council resolved to offer a propine to Arran of 100 merks of wine, wax and spices. The common good would not stretch even to this, and the council was forced to adopt the rather humiliating expedient of accepting an advance in the mails on land held in tack from the town by various burgesses. In this way Thomas Menzies, Alexander Rutherford and Thomas Chalmer were able to help the council out of its difficulties.⁸¹ The poverty of the common good was part of the explanation behind the feuing of the town's lands in 1551, which caused so much dissension at the time and was to be a cause of complaint as late as 1591, when the Menzies family was under attack from certain elements within the town.⁸²

The lands and fishings of the burgh had always proved difficult to administer and their revenues hard to collect. As early as 1498 three of the chaplains of St Nicholas were rewarded with money derived from the town's patrimony of lands and mills, but the stipulation was added that they were to be responsible for collecting the revenues themselves.⁸³ In 1548 the collection of the grassums on the town's lands and fishings had not proved easy, and even the promise that the money raised would be spent on defence against the English had not proved sufficient incentive.⁸⁴ The idea of feuing heritably the burgh lands and fishings was designed to solve a number of these difficulties. It ensured a large injection of cash into the sorely depleted common good of the town; a sum which was badly needed to meet the mounting debt incurred during the war years. The proper administration and collection of the revenues would be guaranteed, and the town was assured of a regular, if inevitably diminishing income. It also provided the more important men of the burgh with an opportunity which had arisen for many of their contemporaries in England and Scotland, the chance to become more firmly entrenched as members of a rentier class with an economic interest in both country and town.⁸⁵

The license to feu the freedom lands and fishings of the burgh was granted in February 1552. In many ways the grant was another example of Menzies opportunism, and showed the advantages to be gained for the burgh oligarchy from a ruling family with direct links to the central government. The Menzies family were in fact securing the kind of privileges and rewards for the burgh that formerly association with the local nobility might have been expected to provide. The earl of Huntly had become largely redundant as a patron in the eyes

of the leading burgesses, and nothing substantial was to be gained from subjection to him. The feuing of the town's lands and fishings was an example of how national and local politics interlocked to the advantage of the locality. The burgesses' opportunity arose from the exploitation of the conflicting self-interest of Mary of Guise and the earl of Arran. The strengthening of ties with France demanded a conciliatory policy from the queen dowager towards the former members of the anglophile party in the country. Thomas Menzies was included in this group. When many of them were shipped off to France in her company, there to be shown how patriotism and adherence to the French alliance might be profitably combined, Thomas Menzies was included in the party.⁸⁶ Meanwhile Arran, sensing that the political wind was set fair for France and anticipating the end of his gubernatorial career, busied himself with distributing favours amongst his friends and supporters. This display of patronage was a useful means of achieving some measure of solvency before he dimitted office. In 1552 Menzies benefited, on behalf of the town, from these circumstances by purchasing a license to feu the lands and fishings for 2,500 merks.⁸⁷ The consortium of merchants behind this initiative were able to dispose of large sums of money, and to embark on a sizeable programme of capital investment in land. Their prosperity and affluence contrasted sharply with the poverty of the common good, of which they were the guardians, and fulfilled one of the conditions for the growth of a sense of urban decline, and the increasing alienation of the oligarchy from the community they represented.⁸⁸

The mover to feu the burgh lands and fishings was not without its opponents, although only three of these were members of the council. Their principal spokesman was Master Robert Lumsden, who had earlier

been part of the earl of Huntly's administration in the burgh. He was joined by Gilbert Kintore and George Bissett, his fellow-councillors, and by a number of others, some of whom were 'bairnis under tutory' with their curators.⁸⁹ The reasons given for their objections were ambiguous, but a variety of interests drew them together. The feuing policy was partly designed to stave off the predatory designs of the local gentry families.⁹⁰ Some of the objectors had been associated with such families in the past. Robert Lumsden had formerly acted as an agent for the Gordons, and he was to do so again in the future.⁹¹ Another client family of the Gordons, the Leslie's, were represented by two of their members amongst the objectors. Three of the others, Gilbert Kintore, Patrick Gray and Andrew Steven had good grounds for complaint since the tacks which they already possessed were taken from them and handed over to other burgesses.⁹² Others like George Bissett who had been associated with the administration of the town's patrimony in the post of keeper of grassums, may have felt aggrieved at the permanent alienation of the historic endowments of the community.⁹³ Whilst such opposition was serious it was not invincible since those in favour of feuing had the governor on their side. However, in the interests of consensus, a commission was established to oversee the setting of the lands and fishings, and Robert Lumsden, the leader of the opposition, was invited to be part of it. When the commission made its final report and divided the spoil Lumsden's was the one dissenting voice.⁹⁴ The feuar may have had more success in converting George Bissett to their view since he was recorded as having accepted a half-net's fishing on the second most fruitful ground in the burgh's gift.⁹⁵

Perhaps inevitably a sizeable proportion of the lands and fishings of the burgh went to sitting members of the council of 1551. Only six of the councillors received nothing from the spoil; of those only four could be said to have been active or potential members of the opposition party: Robert Lumsden, David Anderson, Alexander Gray and Gilbert Kintore. The remaining, Gilbert Menzies junior, the provost's heir, and Master Patrick Rutherford, heir to Alexander Rutherford, could hope to inherit the sizeable wealth and landed property of their fathers. Five of the six commissioners appointed to apportion the lands and fishings of the burgh were members of the council; they also received the lion's share of the spoil. Thomas Menzies added to his property by acquiring the lands of Bog-fairly in feu along with a half net's fishing on the Raik and the Stells, the richest grounds in the Dee. Alexander Rutherford gained the lands of Rubislaw, David Marr the lands of Kingshill, and Thomas Chalmer the lands of Gardyne; all of these received fishings on the Raik. Alexander Knowles and Walter Cullen, long-serving members of the council were not confirmed in the possession of lands but did receive fishings on the Raik in compensation.⁹⁶

One of the aims of the feuing policy was to ensure that the present proprietors would have continued occupation with their tenure given permanence. Undoubtedly this benefited the leading men of the burgh who already held leases on the richer items in the town's patrimony. However, the feuing policy was not without its advantages to lesser members of the burgh too. In all forty-eight inhabitants of the burgh received some portion of the burgh patrimony in 1553, of those only eighteen were members of the council in that year, although some were closely related to members of the council. The largest

contingent in this category were members of the Menzies family, ten of whom received either lands or fishings or both. The holding of a feu was restricted to burgesses but there does not seem to have been any consideration of a wealth qualification for the tenure. Burgesses such as Thomas Branche, one of the early Protestants in the burgh, held a half net's fishing on the Furdes of Dee, even though as late as 1576 he was paying only one merk in taxes, whilst Master Patrick Rutherford, another of the feuars, was paying over three pounds.⁹⁷ The fairly broad-based nature of the feuing policy taken together with its recognition of the power of vested interest may help to account for its general acceptance by the community and the relatively small group of dissenters.

Initially at least the feuing policy meant very little difference to the economic appearance of the burgh. Ostensibly the same people continued to occupy their lands and fishings save that they were now transformed from tenants into proprietors. As time passed opposition did not die down but became more vocal. The psychological difference prompted by a change from tenant to proprietor seems to have begun its work in the consciousness of the feuars, and complaints were raised against some of their practices on the land. Although it is significant that a major plea was not entered before the Court of Session until 1554, by which time the governor had resigned office and been succeeded by Mary of Guise. In August 1554 a note appeared in the council register of a plea pending before the lords directed against the provost and the feuing of the town's lands.⁹⁸ It was in connection with this plea that Robert Lumsden asked the Earl Marischal to use his influence with the regent to obtain a favourable hearing for the plea.⁹⁹ The timing may have been

coincidental, but it is much more likely that it was a direct response to the change of regime. Lumsden's denunciation of the provost failed to interest the regent in the affairs of the burgh: Mary of Guise seems to have been content to allow the Menzies government to continue unchallenged in the burgh.

The litigation continued for some years, and there are frequent references in the council registers to the trouble and expense of continued legal action in Edinburgh.¹⁰⁰ The strength of the opposition should not be underestimated since it still maintained representation on the council. Lumsden, the chief spokesman of the opponents of the feuing policy, was to hold his place on the council until his death and was a respected and influential figure in the burgh throughout the period. In January 1557, after a prolonged and acrimonious struggle, the matter was temporarily resolved when both parties agreed that those who had previously held any tacks should continue to hold them at the new feu-duties, whilst those persons to whom they had been feued were to renounce their right to them on receiving back the fairly substantial grassums they had paid.¹⁰¹ The essential feature of the scheme, the restoration of the burgh finances, remained intact throughout all of these negotiations. Through the implementation of the plan a steady income was assured to the burgh treasury and a large portion of the debt owed by the town was paid off by the grassums received. However, such relief was only temporary, as many of the opponents of the feuing policy must have realised since the constant rise in prices throughout the century meant that the proprietors were getting richer and the burgh poorer. It is perhaps not surprising that matters should have come to a head towards the end of the century when the descendants

of the Menzies and the Rutherfords were waxing rich on property that had formerly belonged to the burgh.

The feuing of the burgh lands and fishings was the climax of a process that had been continuing for over a century. During the previous century and a half the burgesses of Aberdeen had been acquiring property outside the town; it had become a sign, but also a cause of their wealth and status. With the feuing of the burgh patrimony town and country were now united in a fruitful union. The gentry families had gained control of the burgh, but this gentry class was composed from the ranks of the burgesses themselves. The period 1543-1593 in Aberdeen sees the triumph of aristocracy, but it is a burghess aristocracy. This change narrowed the gap still further between the local gentry and nobility and their urban counterparts, the Menzies, the Rutherfords and their fellow burgesses. The urban aristocracy were able to achieve their supremacy without fear of interference from the local prince, the earl of Huntly. This success illustrated the influence they were to wield in the politics of the north-east, which was in turn to aid the survival of Catholicism in the area.¹⁰²

During the middle years of the decade the consolidation of the burghess aristocracy can be clearly seen. It was a regime which could contain a wide variety of opinion within its ranks, even when such opinion was hostile to those in whose hands power was largely concentrated. In this way Robert Lumsden maintained his seat on the council, and it was possible in 1554 for three of the most powerful men in the burgh to be removed as judges in a case involving a humble cordiner on the grounds of potential partiality through kinship.¹⁰³ In fact after 1552 the pattern of direct participation in burgh affairs

was increasing: the number of burgesses on the council was gradually expanding. In that year it had been twenty-four,¹⁰⁴ in 1553 it had increased to twenty-eight,¹⁰⁵ and in 1555 it stood at its largest number ever in this period, thirty-one.¹⁰⁶ Certainly the appearance of Thomas Branche endured for only two years during the crucial period 1554-1555 when the town's feus were being distributed. Similarly with Master Thomas Fynne, a man of moderately wealthy means who was later to serve as clerk to the kirk session.¹⁰⁷ Fynne received a share in the burgh patrimony and sat on the council for only two years. Another of the opponents of the feuing policy, Patrick Leslie, emerged as a member of the council, but he too served for one year only in 1554. Such an expansion in the representation on the council may have been to accomodate the various sectional interests that had come to prominence during the disputes over the matter of the town's feus. The controversy over the feuing policy emphasised the town council's role as the forum for all political debate in the burgh and set the pattern for the establishment's reaction to the Reformation in 1560.

A succesful attempt to limit the membership of the town council was made in 1556. The elections of that year appear to have been conducted in an unusual manner reminiscent of those of 1545.¹⁰⁸ In 1556 the provost and bailies withdrew to St Ninian's chapel, within the ramparts of the Castle Hill, to choose the councillors. The list contained in the council registers is headed with the inscription Secret Council.¹⁰⁹ In all fourteen councillors were chosen to serve along with the provost and four bailies. Needless to say, the largest representation on the council went to the Menzies family: six of their names appeared on the council roll. Their influence

was counterbalanced by that of the bailies, none of whom were members of the Menzies family. The council was not intended to be a creature of the Menzies family: opposition elements also found their place on it. Family ties also played their part in the construction of this group, since Master Duncan Forbes, a son of Robert Lumsden's sister Margaret, also served as a councillor,¹¹⁰ and Alexander Rutherford was joined by his son Master Patrick. Similarly, Andrew Lawson was succeeded on the council by his son John, and he together with Thomas Nicholson, who had begun life as the son of a notary and was rapidly increasing in wealth and influence, was later to marry into the Menzies family. Dynastic links were strengthened by business partnerships. Nicholson, having achieved the influential position of clerk of the Coquet had extensive interests in trade. He and David Marr, another influential councillor, were partners in the ownership of a ship which carried Aberdeen goods across the North Sea.¹¹¹

By the end of 1556 a small group of wealthy burgesses had installed themselves at the heart of the town's government and were able to remain there almost unchallenged until the last decade of the century. Increasingly the offices of the burgh were concentrated in their hands and devoted to the cementing of their already considerable power. At the centre of this group lay the Menzies. By 1559 Thomas Menzies held the tack of the customs of the burgh,¹¹² whilst his son had been the master of the town's blockhouse and charged with the care of the town's artillery for many years past. This may help to explain why Menzies was able to sell some pieces of artillery to the town in 1558.¹¹³ Both Thomas Menzies and Gilbert his son had held commissions of justiciary,¹¹⁴ and although they faced occasional

challenges to their control of the offices of the burgh such opposition was usually contained within the confined ranks of the ruling oligarchy of the burgh, and successfully defused.

From 1556 succession to vacant seats on the council was almost exclusively hereditary. The only movement within the council was in terms of appointment to the office of bailie. The control the group at the centre was able to exercise was considerable, since not only were all of the resources of patronage of the burgh at its disposal but so were the key offices, such as clerk of the cocket and custumar, on which the economic life of the burgh depended. The council had installed itself so firmly at the head of the civic affairs that it could not be bypassed; it was the sole effective link between the burgh and central government. No one faction could control the entire burgh; the web of influence was too widely spread for one family to dominate. However, by judicious co-operation amongst various families and power groups stability and prosperity could be maintained. The burgh became virtually a fief of this merchant elite whose assurance and sense of hereditary right was eventually to alienate the other sectors of burgh society. Meanwhile the urban patriciate, so clearly visible in outline at least in the elections of 1556, was to follow the same course of action as their counterparts amongst the gentry and nobility. They shared similar patterns of alliance building and dynastic marriage and a united front against any common external foes. The advent of religious conflict with its appeal to conscience as well as political realism, could throw into confusion any pattern of established relationships within the burgh. The Reformation took place as the burgh elite was still in process of attempting to reach some sort of mutual

accommodation after the decisive shift of power which had taken place in 1556.

The absence of any real opposition to the consolidation of the oligarchy may be accounted for in terms of the general stability of burgh life during these years. The strain of the English wars of the 1540s, both financial and psychological, may have siphoned off any pressure for internal reform. Any opposition from the craft guilds was made more difficult by the actions of the crown in giving to the provost and bailies of the burghs the right to nominate deacons of the crafts.¹¹⁴ The area of influence exercised by the Aberdeen patriciate was thereby increased. On the whole relationships between the council and the crafts were, if not always amicable, tinged with mutual respect, and an awareness of boundaries which should not be infringed. Any attempt by the council to admit members to the freedom of the crafts without the consent of the craft was speedily and heartily challenged. Again in 1547 the coopers, under the pressures of a wartime economy, made a strong protest that men were being admitted to freedom without the consent of the whole craft.¹¹⁵ The coopers were particularly influential in that they provided the barrels for the all-important export of salmon, on which a great part of the economy of Aberdeen rested.

The picture that emerges of the burgh of Aberdeen towards the end of the 1550s is one of a burgh more or less at peace within itself and reasonably secure from outside pressures and influences. The threat from the local aristocracy had been successfully defused and an accommodation reached with the Gordons. Tensions within the burgh had been confined to the ranks of the small group which presided over the town and formed the council. Differences had been

sufficiently recognised to allow burgh government to continue with an adequate amount of profit for those who set out to serve the community in office. The limits of power had been successfully defined and the parameters of opposition illustrated by various successfully resolved disputes, such as the prolonged argument over the setting in feu of the town's lands and fishings. The process by which the patriciate installed itself at the centre of Aberdeen life had been continuing for the previous fifty years; gradually increasing its influence, it had established itself as a co-operative of merchant princes cementing its power by laying down patterns of domestic, dynastic and commercial alliance. The progress of this grand design was threatened, but not seriously impeded by the religious and political events of 1560. The success with which the purpose of the merchant princes had been attended is clearly visible in that it took almost as long to dismantle the facade of oligarchy as it had to construct it in the first place.

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CHAPTER THREE

The Bishop, the Diocese and the University of Aberdeen
at the time of the Reformation.

One of the most striking characteristics of the diocese of Aberdeen in the sixteenth century was its geographical rationality.¹ The limits of the bishop's pastoral care marched closely with the natural political boundaries of the region. The institutional structures of the Catholic Church, centred on the episcopal burgh of Aberdeen and covering Aberdeenshire, Banffshire and a small portion of Kincardineshire, helped to give coherence and expression to the distinct regional identity of the area. Throughout the north-east political, ecclesiastical and social frontiers met and overlapped at various points rarely challenging and often mutually reinforcing one another. The relative isolation of the diocese, taken together with its pronounced localism, was to prove of great benefit to the cause of Catholicism after 1560; in 1495 these features had been advanced in favour of the foundation of the University of Aberdeen.

In his foundation bull of the University of Aberdeen Pope Alexander VI, doubtless stimulated by the original petition of Bishop Elphinstone, referred to the isolation of the northern parts of Scotland from the rest of the country. He concluded that, since the area was separated from the rest of Scotland 'per maris bracchia et montes altissimos', a university was necessary there to save the inhabitants from the 'rudeness and barbarity' resulting from their peripheral position.² Laying aside Roman hyperbole it is possible to see behind these papal phrases Elphinstone's intention that his new seat of learning should serve predominantly local needs. He hoped that the university would serve as both stimulus and resource centre for reform, primarily within his own diocese and secondarily within the country at large.³ That King's College was to play an

important role in the pastoral strategy of the diocese is seen from the assignation of a number of the ecclesiastical revenues of the diocese to its support,⁴ and its predominantly local appeal may be deduced from the number of Aberdeenshire names that appear amongst its staff and students. Moreover recognition of its regional emphasis was built into its constitutional structure. As in other universities the rector was elected by the four nations representing the territorial origins of the academic corporation.⁵ Three of the 'nations', Aberdeen, Angus and Moray, represented Scotland north of the Spey, the fourth, Lothian, was left to cover the rest of Scotland.⁶ Elphinstone's university was for local men to serve the local community. It was designed to supply all that a well-regulated Christian commonwealth might need. To that end he encouraged local men to teach as well as study in it and thereby won for it more than a local reputation.⁷

The distinctive localism of the north-east of Scotland in general, and the diocese of Aberdeen in particular, was underscored by strong European connections. The geographical constraints imposed by the Grampians, the Cairngorms and the valleys of the Dee, the Esk and the Firth of Tay, directed the attention of the inhabitants of the region to its eastern sea-board. The constant traffic to and fro across the North Sea from the port of Aberdeen to northern Europe drew the region into the cultural community of the late renaissance. The early vitality of the University of Aberdeen may be partly traced not only to its association with the traditional centres of learning like Paris, but to other vibrant foci of reforming Catholic opinion such as Louvain and Cologne. A significant number of Scots, including a large proportion of Aberdonians, studied at

Louvain during the first half of the sixteenth century, and although the stream diminished to a trickle after 1560 it did not dry up completely.⁸ Alexander Galloway, a protégé of Elphinstone and several times rector of King's College, was a friend of Latomus the celebrated Louvain humanist and canon of Windesheim. When Lutheranism became a distinct threat to Catholicism in Scotland Galloway wrote to his old friend to consult him about the dangers posed to orthodoxy by the appearance of 'Patrick's Places', the work of the martyred Patrick Hamilton.⁹ The significant Parisian influences on the development of the university have been well dealt with elsewhere,¹⁰ as has the work of the Italian humanist, Giovanni Ferreri in association with the abbey of Kinloss in Moray.¹¹ All of these factors combined present a picture of localism with a definite cosmopolitan twist. Many of the fashions in educational and theological thought reached Aberdeen unmediated through any other Scottish urban centre and were diffused from there to other parts of the country.

Another feature of the strongly local character of the Church in Aberdeen was the ever-present Scottish phenomenon of kinship and family alliance. In the temporal sphere family loyalty may appear as patronage and be cited approvingly as contributing to political stability, whereas the same factor in the ecclesiastical realm often appears as nepotism and is condemned. The history of the sixteenth century Church in Aberdeen suggests that a fine line separates legitimate patronage from unacceptable nepotism. In the years 1500-1577 the episcopate was held for a total of thirty four years by two members of the Gordon family. Alexander Gordon, a cousin of the third earl of Huntly, occupied the see briefly from 1516-1518, and William, uncle of the fourth earl, held it for the

considerably longer period 1545-1577. Both owed their promotions to their powerful kinsmen and both showed appropriate signs of gratitude.¹² Alexander did not live long enough to give adequate financial recompense to his cousin, but William was able to make his nephew bailie of the diocese and its temporalities.¹³ Patronage of kinsmen was a legitimate means of ensuring effective government and even the reforming Bishop Elphinstone had not been above a little prudential nepotism.¹⁴

When Elphinstone set about staffing his new college he found space for his own relative, Adam, who had studied at the College de Montaigu in Paris. Adam was promoted to the archdeaconry of the diocese of Aberdeen.¹⁵ His appointment was only one of a succession made by Bishop Elphinstone to various posts in the chapter and the university in Old Aberdeen. Adam was succeeded as archdeacon by Robert Elphinstone who later supervised the construction of the bishop's funeral monument.¹⁶ As late as 1547 an Elphinstone was promoted to a canonry of Aberdeen, albeit as a client of the earl of Arran.¹⁷ However, the Elphinstone name was only one of those to occur in the history of the diocese. Apart from the series of Gordons, Hays and Setons there appears a line of Myretons ranging from Thomas Myreton, treasurer at the end of the fifteenth century,¹⁸ to Hector Myreton, bursar in civil law in 1518,¹⁹ and also Patrick Myreton, treasurer 1551-1571, and exiled for his fidelity to Catholicism in 1573.²⁰ The names of Ogilvie and Seton also feature prominently in the lists of senior clergy during these years.²¹ The bonds of association were not simply vertical in terms of lineal family descent; they were also lateral extending to uncles and cousins. Thus when William Gordon, subsequently bishop, studied at Aberdeen he was taught by his uncles, William and James Ogilvie.²² The network of

family and political relationship that governed the temporal world was reflected in the internal structures maintaining the administrative coherence of the spiritual realm. The close-knit world of north-eastern-dynastic relationships with its noble and client families, its dependence on mutual interest and shared aspirations for the effective execution of policy, was also reflected in the internal political framework of the Church in Aberdeen.

Elphinstone's efforts at reform in Aberdeen could not have progressed without the support of clients in the chapter and in the university. The bishop was not all-powerful in his diocese: he was dependent, like the earl of Huntly in his field, on building up a party. His lieutenants in turn constructed their own patterns of authority, building very often on the natural bond of family relationship which was one of the key determinants of daily life. In this way Hector Boece was to be found working in close association with his brother Arthur,²³ whilst there were at least two Galloways in the higher ranks of Aberdeen's intellectual society. Alexander was several times rector of the university, and was a power to be reckoned with almost until the Reformation.²⁴ His kinsman, Andrew Galloway, was the last Catholic sub-principal of the university and, like Alexander, had close links with Louvain.²⁵ The result of this pattern of patronage and alliance building was that the cathedral chapter and university were tied in more closely with the administration of the diocese and became more representative of the area as a whole. In many ways the religious and political establishments became mirror images of each other.

One of the consequences of the particularism of the Church in Aberdeen was the extraordinary continuity and stability in its personnel. Many of the staff of King's College seem to have enjoyed outstanding longevity with careers spanning more than half a century. Throughout the first fifty years of its existence the university was governed by only four principals, whereas the University of Glasgow experienced five in only twenty years.²⁶ The spirit of Boece lived on in his associates William Hay,²⁷ and Alexander Galloway, and endured until 1569 when one of Boece's former pupils, Alexander Anderson, was deposed from the principalship for religious non-conformity.²⁸ John Davidson, a graduate of Aberdeen and later principal of the University of Glasgow, may have had occasion to remind Quintin Kennedy of Crossraguel of the former 'Parisian kyndness' that had existed between them in years past,²⁹ but it was possible for the staff of King's to share a similar 'kyndness' even after their religious opinions sharply diverged.³⁰ The ties binding the ruling class of the region together were not only those of blood but also those of intellectual formation.

Academically speaking King's College was a self-sufficient corporation drawing its professors from the ranks of its graduates.³¹ A strong esprit de corps and a firm line of theological policy was developed in a short time. It is this internal coherence articulated in a shared vision of the educational process and commitment to doctrinal orthodoxy, taken together with the strong degree of local support through family relationship and political association, that made Aberdeen so resistant to Protestant infiltration after 1560. Like many such institutions the clerical and academic establishment tended to close ranks when faced with external threats to its existence.

It is a tribute to the far-sightedness of Bishop Elphinstone, combined with his discerning recruiting policy, that by the 1530s the University of Aberdeen should have gained an international reputation. By 1534 the Italian Giovanni Ferreri felt able to describe Aberdeen as the most celebrated of the Scottish universities.³² John Major, the venerable and highly respected theologian, referred to King's as that 'noble college'.³³ Certainly the university had been in the vanguard of the dissemination of the new learning.³⁴ In 1541 it had been able to muster enough scholars with at least a nodding acquaintance with Greek to address the king and queen in that language during their visit to the burgh.³⁵ Aberdeen's excellence was also acknowledged by John Latomus, the Louvain scholar, who penned a eulogy of Hector Boece and the university he helped to found.³⁶

During the sixteenth century the strength of Aberdeen within Scotland was to be of help to other universities which had fallen on hard times. King's College acted as a resource centre for St Andrews in its work of reform and renewal during the middle years of the century.³⁷ Archbishop James Beaton's planned foundation of St Mary's College at St Andrews was allegedly designed along the lines of King's College,³⁸ whilst during the troubled years of the 1550s St Andrews looked to Aberdeen to supply its rector.³⁹ In 1537 James Strachan was incorporated in St Andrews and elected rector on 28 February 1537. He was given a second term in February 1538 and recalled from the rectorship of Aberdeen in 1544 to resume that of St Andrews.⁴⁰ During the three following years in which he held the post Strachan devoted himself to the maintenance of the privileges of the university and to work for its reform.

The principal reasons for the decline of St Andrews was traced by

Strachan to a general decline in the number of teachers and students which was leading to the 'increisinge of hereces and strangis opinionis amangis ye commone pepill'.⁴¹ The lamentable state of the university proved eventually to be too much for Strachan and he resigned his office.⁴² However, the influence of Aberdeen on St Andrews did not end with Strachan's resignation. The electors of St Andrews turned their attention once more to Aberdeen and chose a graduate of King's College, John Spittal, official principal of St Andrews, to be their rector. Spittal seems to have held office from 1548-1550, and so it was as rector of the University, of St Andrews that he attended the provincial council of 1549.⁴³ On at least two occasions in fairly troubled times, St Andrews paid tribute to the academic standards and reputation of Aberdeen by turning to it for its rector.

Strachan and Spittal were both members of clerical dynasties in Aberdeen. A member of the Spittal family, Henry, who was also a relation of Bishop Elphinstone, had been regent in philosophy at King's during the time of Hector Boece.⁴⁴ John Spittal was one of the first canonists at Aberdeen,⁴⁵ while Alexander Spittal, parson of Clatt, was a canon of the Aberdeen chapter in 1547.⁴⁶ James Strachan was probably a pupil of Robert Wauchope at Paris in 1527,⁴⁷ and at least one of his relatives, Master Gilbert Strachan, served on the cathedral chapter of Aberdeen.⁴⁸ James Strachan himself held on to his prebend until 1569 when it was recorded that his son was to be deprived of the benefice due to his unlawful provision.⁴⁹ The patterns of association and family interest amongst the ecclesiastical dynasties of the diocese of Aberdeen extended over at least fifty or sixty years. This rendered it particularly difficult for an alternative Protestant establishment, bereft of strong

local patrons and operating outside the accepted political structures of the region, to make a place for itself in the area.

Despite Aberdeen's involvement in the revival of St Andrews, and its position as a resource centre for the other Scottish universities, it has been suggested that it suffered a considerable decline in the latter years of the 1540s.⁵⁰ One of the principal items of evidence cited in support of this thesis is the record of the visitation carried out by the rector of King's College in 1549.⁵¹ It may be the case that Aberdeen shared in the general decline that appears to have affected most of the Scottish universities during these years, but it is not quite clear that the decline of Aberdeen was as serious as occasionally supposed.

Elphinstone's careful endowment of his college seems to have protected it from the general dilapidation of its revenues, a problem which appears to have afflicted the University of Glasgow.⁵² Aberdeen may also have shared the other difficulty faced by Glasgow, declining numbers of students. In the 1550s Glasgow had come close to collapse due to a shortage of students.⁵³ St Andrews not only faced smaller classes but also serious divisions amongst the teaching staff. One of the complaints addressed to the earl of Arran by the teaching staff of St Andrews in 1546 stated that St Andrews was 'sa desolate and destitute bayth of rederis, techaris and auditors yat it is neir perist and meretis nocht to be callit ane universite'.⁵⁴ A comparison with Aberdeen is difficult to make since the matriculation rolls do not survive for these years; the exact extent of the student population may not be accurately gauged. However, the 1549 visitation records are of some use in determining the numerical strength of the staff. The records relate that

some of the more prominent members of the staff were ordered to resume their teaching by the visitors. Only two, the mediciner and the civilist were condemned for never being present, which in turn suggests that the college usually maintained a full complement of staff and that there were students to teach.⁵⁵ It may be the case that there was something amiss in King's College, but the problem did not necessarily relate to decadence and corruption amongst the staff.

Since the records of the 1549 visitation are the only ones to have survived for any such event, there is a danger that they might assume undue importance out of all proportion to their real value. Bishop Elphinstone's foundation charter had stipulated that there should be an annual visitation of the college by the rector.⁵⁶ This condition was re-stated by Gavin Douglas in his new foundation charter of 1531, although he added that the visitors should be elected by the university.⁵⁷ A visitation was not an inevitably hostile or extraordinary event. It would have been undertaken by members of the university at the initiative of the chancellor. Since the chancellor of the day was Bishop William Gordon, whose reputation was not such as to lead to the conclusion that he was an ardent moral reformer, it is unlikely that the 1549 was anything out of the ordinary or more than a matter of regular academic routine.⁵⁸

The commission of visitation of 1549 was composed of prominent clerics of the diocese of Aberdeen with Alexander Galloway, the rector of the university, leading the delegation. According to the new foundation charter of Bishop Dunbar, the rector was bound to reside in the college even if he were not a member of the university.⁵⁹ Dunbar's charter also provided for the rector to be accompanied by four 'worthy masters of the university to be elected by it'. On this

occasion Galloway was joined by four canons of the chapter, including the archdeacon of the diocese.⁶⁰ These four were all of some standing in the local Church and three of them appear as signatories of Dunbar's charter of 1531.⁶¹ Their inclusion on the board of visitors suggests the stability and continuity of personnel amongst the higher clergy in Aberdeen, and further illustrates the point that the visitation was not necessarily an outside initiative. It was led by an actual resident of the university assisted by men who would have known both staff and students well.

The archdeacon of the diocese, Patrick Myreton, was the most senior of the assistants. There were a number of Myretons holding benefices in and around Aberdeen during these years. Patrick may have occupied a family benefice in the chapter. He had been provided to the archdeaconry in succession to Thomas Myreton who had held the benefice during Elphinstone's government of the see.⁶² Thomas appears to have been one of Elphinstone's confidants since he was later nominated as one of the bishop's executors.⁶³ He also left an annuity of seventy merks to the Aberdeen Franciscans for prayers for the repose of the bishop's soul.⁶⁴ Another Myreton, William, was master of the Sang School in Old Aberdeen.⁶⁵ The Myretons were originally a Fife family with strong associations with the collegiate church at Crail. Sir William Myreton endowed the college in 1517 and a line of clerics bearing his name held the office of provost of the church.⁶⁶ Patrick's academic career included a spell in the Pedagogy at St Andrews where he was recorded as determining in 1525.⁶⁷ He was still at St Andrews in 1527 when he was named amongst the licentiates and described as dives.⁶⁸ From St Andrews Myreton passed to the family benefice at Aberdeen.⁶⁹

Patrick Myreton's career was that of an intelligent, well-connected and cultivated cleric of the mid-sixteenth century. The aptness of his St Andrews designation as dives may be gathered from the character of his social connections. The year before he embarked on his visitation of the University of Aberdeen he received license under the privy seal to accompany James Stewart, commendator of St Andrews and later earl of Moray, to France to further his education.⁷⁰ He moved in high society. In later years, in the testimony he gave to the tribunal investigating the plea by Mary Queen of Scots for an annulment of her marriage to Bothwell, Myreton gave an account of the kind of life he enjoyed in Scotland before his non-conformity forced a tactical withdrawal to France. In his statement in Paris Myreton described himself as seventy years old and he claimed an acquaintance of over twenty years with the earl of Bothwell. This relationship was formed at Spynie, the home of Bothwell's uncle the Bishop of Moray, with whom Myreton claimed to be very intimate. He also said he knew Lady Jean Gordon, Bothwell's first wife, and her parents the earl and countess of Huntly. He proved this claim by being able to recite their genealogies to the second and third generation. The range of his acquaintance spread even further than the pillars of the local political and ecclesiastical establishments and reached Queen Mary herself whom he said he knew 'very well'.⁷¹

The spread of Myreton's social and ecclesiastical connections undercuts any presentation of him as a determined reformer intent on rooting out vice and corruption; his relationship with the Bishop of Moray is most significant in that respect. Bishop Hepburn's depredations and moral lapses have been ruthlessly chronicled

by Hay Fleming.⁷² The bishop produced at least ten bastards many of them by different mothers. His infidelity to his vow of celibacy was consistent and apparently indiscriminate. Unlike his friend Myreton, Bishop Hepburn did not choose exile rather than acceptance of the Reformation.⁷³ His attitude remained conservative and highly equivocal but it did not prompt him to leave Scotland.⁷⁴ Yet, despite their seeming difference in outlook and life-style, Myreton remained a reasonably close associate of Hepburn's and seemed happy to mix in north-eastern society with him and his kinsman. Such a pattern of relationship says as much about Myreton as the appearance of his signature on the acts of the 1549 visitation of King's College.

Myreton's companions on the commission of visitation were all from a similar background to his own. Alexander Spittal was a member of the family which included Henry and John, who had long associations with King's College. James Wawan, another of the commissioners, was part of a succession of Wawans to hold office in Old Aberdeen. In the middle of the fifteenth century a William Wawan was presented to the prebend of Ellon and still featured amongst the canons of Aberdeen in 1502.⁷⁵ Some years later James Wawan is to be found holding the same benefice,⁷⁶ whilst another James Wawan held the living of Oyne in 1587.⁷⁷ The influence of this family on the ecclesiastical affairs of Aberdeen may be traced for well over a century. The last member of the group, Master Duncan Burnet, held the prebend of Methlick. Burnet too had emerged from a local family, being connected by marriage with a prominent local landed notarial family, the Lumsdens of Clova.⁷⁸ There were Burnets amongst the burgesses of Aberdeen, one of whom,

Master James, objected to the demolition of the friaries in 1560.⁷⁹ The character of Duncan's own piety and the quality of his religious interests may be seen in his support for the Observantine Franciscan friary in Aberdeen. He was described in their necrology as a 'pater specialis', and whilst he held the living of Methlick gave them many gifts including an annual endowment of ten merks together with alms, and vestments to be used at the high altar.⁸⁰ It was in the Franciscan house that he received the resignation of another relation, Master Robert Burnet vicar pensionary of Aberdeen, in April 1551.⁸¹ The Burnet connection with the Church in Aberdeen did not end with Master Duncan since a Thomas Burnet, parson of Methlick and commissary of Aberdeen, appeared on a commission to interview the new master of the Aberdeen Grammar School in 1580.⁸² All of these men were scions of ecclesiastical dynasties of almost Trollopian proportions. All were typical servants of the medieval Church. The Reformation did not necessarily break the hold of these families on particular benefices, nor did it immediately end their power in the local community. The accumulated weight of tradition embodied in the dynastic and professional experience of such families made them considerable obstacles to the new Protestant establishment which was forced either to accomodate them or to work round them, it was to prove very difficult to remove them.

If the visitors of King's College in 1549 were local men so were those they were charged to visit. In the first article of the acts of the visitation, the names of the staff are listed together with the injunction that they were to begin teaching within nine days or be subjected to canonical penalties.⁸³ At the

head of the college stood John Bisset as principal, with Alexander Anderson as sub-principal. There is some doubt as to the degree of control Bisset actually wielded in the college. It is often claimed that he was a rather weak character who allowed the affairs of the college to slip out of his control.⁸⁴ In this regard the visitation of 1549 is sometimes seen as an attempt to restore the fortunes of an institution dilapidated by lack of direction and neglect. Bisset had not been in office for very long by 1549 and his original appointment appears to have caused some discussion in Old Aberdeen.

When Hector Boece, the first principal of King's College, died in 1536 he was succeeded by his close friend and colleague William Hay.⁸⁵ Hay had served under Boece since the college was founded,⁸⁶ and like Boece was in the Parisian tradition with an interest in Erasmian humanism.⁸⁷ During his years at King's, Hay formed several generations of Aberdeen scholars, amongst whom was Alexander Anderson. Anderson's early history is obscure. He may have been a member of an Aberdeen family since there were a large number of Andersons in the burgh.⁸⁸ His links with Hay are clearly borne out in Anderson's role as sub-principal of the college in 1537.⁸⁹ Hay's promotion to the principalship had been rapidly followed by Anderson's to the sub-principalship. Anderson must have inspired Hay's confidence, indeed the surviving manuscript of Hay's lectures came at some time into Anderson's possession.⁹⁰ Their common intellectual interests may be seen in their exchange of books; Anderson received a copy of Erasmus' Paraphrases from Hay in exchange for one of the works of Cajetan.⁹¹ The work by Erasmus was clearly of some importance in Aberdeen

since Boece remarked that in 1528 a visiting Danish scholar had been impressed to find the students using it.⁹²

According to the foundation charter, appointment to the principalship was to be by election.⁹³ Customarily the out-going principal had been succeeded by his deputy: thus Hay had succeeded Boece in 1537, even though he must have been over seventy years old at the time.⁹⁴ On Hay's death in 1542 it might have been assumed that Anderson would succeed him. Perhaps unusually on this occasion the succession went to one of the other regents of the college, John Bisset whose only action on behalf of the college had been as procurator in 1542.⁹⁵ Bisset may have been something of an outside candidate. His association with the college had been long, but interspersed with periods as master of Aberdeen's grammar school between the years 1519-1531.⁹⁶ His links with the Aberdeen grammar school do not appear to have been completely severed until 1539 when he was replaced as master.⁹⁷ His ties with King's College went back to 1516 when he is first found as regent, and on occasion in subsequent years he had acted as procurator for the mediciner Robert Gray.⁹⁸

The existence of a certain amount of tension within the college is suggested by Bisset's unsuccessful attempts to resign his office on at least two occasions. In 1547 he resigned in favour of William Cranston, a graduate of St Andrews.⁹⁹ Cranston's appointment is unusual in that it shows King's College to have been looking outside its own ranks to draw from the broader reserves of talent in the other Scottish universities. Cranston was much more representative of the Parisian tradition than Bisset; he had incepted at Paris in 1533 and had even served as rector of

the university during the period when a number of Scottish students resided there, including Quentin Kennedy, William Hay and John Davidson.¹⁰⁰ There was even a rumour that had reached John Knox that Cranston had forced a recantation on a point of doctrine out of his fellow student John Calvin.¹⁰¹ By 1547 Cranston had a reputation for theological learning combined with doctrinal orthodoxy and, having studied at Paris in the 1530s, he was quite familiar with the Lutheran threat. His provision to the principalship, although unfruitful, was part of the Catholic counter-reforming offensive which was making its appearance in Aberdeen. It also suggests the existence of a body of opinion within the university concerned about Catholic reform and intent on maintaining the Parisian and humanist traditions of the founders. Bisset's resignations taken together with his absence from the reforming provincial council of 1549 implied that he may have been thought inadequate to meet the challenge facing the Church by some of his colleagues. Certainly Anderson knew Cranston since he owned a work of Aristotle that had once belonged to the Parisian doctor.¹⁰² Anderson may have hoped for a continuation of the spirit of Boece and Hay with the appointment of Cranston to their office. Cranston's later career suggests that he would not have been disappointed.

In 1553 Bisset made another fruitless attempt to resign this time in favour of Alexander Anderson.¹⁰³ Since Bisset is described as principal on a number of occasions after this date it appears that the resignation was vain. Even as late as 1565, just before his death, Bisset was able to sign a document of procuratorship describing himself as 'primarius novi collegii

aberdonensis'.¹⁰⁴ However, on all public occasions and in the provincial councils Alexander-Anderson appears to have represented the college. It may be that some agreement had been reached between the members of the staff and the principal that Anderson would fulfil the function of principal whilst Bisset would continue to hold the title.

If there had been some dispute over the principalship the refusal of some of the masters to teach may be better understood; the academic strike was a well-tried weapon. The first injunction of the visitors in 1549 was addressed to the principal, sub-principal, mediciner, grammarian, cantor and sacristan ordering them to resume their teaching.¹⁰⁵ Most of these men were of some eminence and distinction and it seems unlikely that all of them should have succumbed at once to decadence and indolence. Some of them, including Robert Gray the mediciner, had been responsible for establishing the original academic excellence of King's. Gray was himself an Aberdeen man whose grounding in learning had been laid by John Waus at King's College. Gray described himself as 'philosophiae amator' in one of his marginal comments in his copy of the De Medica materia of Dioscorides.¹⁰⁶ Another of those rebuked for neglecting to teach was the grammarian Theophilus Stewart. Stewart was an inheritor of the Parisian tradition, having studied there in 1529.¹⁰⁷ The effect of his teaching and his competence in the ancient languages was judged by the king and queen when they made their celebrated visit to Aberdeen in 1541 and heard the students reciting Greek and Hebrew.¹⁰⁸

None of the staff were removed from office after the visitation of 1549 and some of them even continued to serve in the

college not only after the events of 1560 but also after the purge of 1569. Theophilus Stewart was one of these.¹⁰⁹ The sacristan, Alexander Wright, also continued to be involved in the affairs of the college since he was a witness to a charter of John Bisset's in 1565,¹¹⁰ and even as late as 1578 he was engaging in the leasing of property belonging to his chaplaincy of the Jesus altar in the parish kirk of Aberdeen.¹¹¹ Alexander Anderson's Catholic sympathies are well-known and are evident from his defence of the college in 1560 when the first tide of the Reformation broke against Old Aberdeen,¹¹² and from his expulsion from the college during the purge of 1569. It is difficult to reconcile the continuity of personnel, the eminence of the staff and the aggressive conservatism of King's College in the 1560s, with the charge of wholesale corruption and decline in the 1540s.

The problems encountered by the visitors may not have lain simply with the staff but also with the students. The visitation record of 1549 suggests that one of the difficulties faced by the commission, namely a reluctance on the part of the students to receive holy orders, may have been connected to a movement on their part away from doctrinal orthodoxy.¹¹³ Such a trend would have economic as well as theological implications for the college. It was a condition of the foundation that certain obligations regarding masses and public liturgical prayers would be celebrated by the members of the college for its founder and benefactors.¹¹⁴ The students in theology, who also happened to be those who were reluctant to receive holy orders, were relied upon to fulfil their share of the burden of the endowment since they benefited from its

fruits. The visitors may have uncovered an extremely important issue here which gives valuable insight into the workings of the medieval Church.

No reason for the apparent reluctance by the students in theology to receive holy orders is given.¹¹⁵ Such reluctance may possibly be attributed to the general surplus of clergy in the country at the time. It has been proposed that there was an excess of clerical graduates in the country for the amount of ecclesiastical benefices available for them.¹¹⁶ In such a climate a reluctance to take on the obligations of priesthood is understandable. Those who wished for an academic or administrative career, provided they could secure the necessary patronage and financial support, might think twice before presenting themselves for ordination. The appointment of John Rutherford as dean of the Divinity faculty at St Andrews in 1557 illustrated that there was a strong body of opinion in the country which held that it was not necessary to be in holy orders to teach theology.¹¹⁷ The fear of simply becoming a 'massing priest' without pastoral care was a real one, and not unknown amongst reformers. Indeed the reforming attitude to the theology of ministry may already have found adherents in Aberdeen as elsewhere in Scotland. Even the bishop complained in 1547 that heresy was greatly thriving in his diocese.¹¹⁸

It has been proposed that reforming sympathies may have been evident in King's College as early as the 1540s and that the 1549 visitation confirms this impression.¹¹⁹ Amongst those who were reluctant to accept ordination was James Annand, a law student in 1549. Annand subsequently became a minister in Orkney and was charged in 1568 with the responsibility of planting kirks

there.¹²⁰ Another student in 1549, Alexander Allardice, later appeared as minister of Kirkcudbright, whilst his colleague, William Skene, went on to teach at St Andrews and was declared fit for the ministry by the General Assembly.¹²¹ Perhaps the most notable student of the year was John Davidson later principal of the University of Glasgow. His subsequent conversion to Protestantism shocked his friends Giovanni Ferreri and Archbishop James Beaton of Glasgow.¹²² In a small college the presence of such a group of potential dissidents may have caused real anxiety and even disruption to the life of the university.

The visitors were certainly concerned enough about the lack of attendance at the public liturgy of the college to make stipulations regarding it. A system of fines was established for non-attendance and Master John Henderson was elected to mark down the names of absentees.¹²³ Henderson later went on to become master of the grammar school in Aberdeen in 1558,¹²⁴ maintaining his employment at the Reformation and even having his salary increased.¹²⁵ His own attitudes to religion were conservative. He supported his pupils when they petitioned the town council in 1569 for the restoration of their Christmas holidays.¹²⁶ His true religious allegiance became abundantly clear in 1573 when he chose exile rather than conform to the new Kirk. He retired with James Cheyne of Arnage to Paris where he died some little time later.¹²⁷

Henderson's history was not unique amongst his contemporaries. A number follow the same pattern. Many of those who studied or taught at Aberdeen in the 1540s had connections with the University of Louvain, the leading anti-Lutheran intellectual centre of the time. Louvain was also associated with pressure for Catholic

reform coming from Cologne and the Rhineland, to which Louvain often looked for inspiration and guidance.¹²⁸ In 1551 Bishop Gordon himself had matriculated as a student there, to be followed by Andrew Galloway, the last Catholic sub-principal of King's, in 1556.¹²⁹ The traffic with Louvain seems to have increased proportionately after the Reformation. In 1560 there were several Aberdonians with King's College links studying there; Duncan Norie, who was a regent in 1559,¹³⁰ Gilbert Skene, who had been appointed to the mediciner's chair in 1556,¹³¹ and Master Robert Hay, who later joined the Jesuits.¹³² In 1563 Master Alexander Cheyne, probably the commissary of Aberdeen and canonist at King's before and after the Reformation, was recorded as a poor student at Louvain.¹³³ Another of the Hays, John, appeared along with Archibald Hog in 1564 and, in 1565, John Cheyne, who may have been the brother of Alexander and who later became famous in Aberdeen politics.¹³⁴

The years before and after the Reformation thus saw several regents and former regents of King's College at the University of Louvain, where they would have had the opportunity of study but also of mixing with the large number of English religious exiles there. Not all of those who studied at Louvain during this time maintained their loyalty to Catholicism, although many did. Andrew Galloway returned from Louvain to teach at King's after 1560, but was deprived in 1569. Whereupon he returned to France and continued the practice of his faith.¹³⁵ James Chalmers, a Louvain student in 1561, never returned to Scotland and died in Augsburg.¹³⁶ Duncan Norie appeared as a regent at King's in 1559 along with James Chalmers and turned up at Louvain in 1560. He returned home after that date and resumed teaching only to be

expelled in 1569.¹³⁷ John Melville, regent at King's in 1542, featured in Louvain in 1560 but the course of his subsequent career is not clear.¹³⁸ John Rait was a regent in 1559 but eventually chose exile and appeared at the German College in Rome in 1567.¹³⁹ However, perhaps most interesting of all are those members of staff who took up temporary residence abroad but who finally decided to return home to take up service under the new Kirk. The ambivalence of their position was to be of some importance in the eventual foundation of Marischal College.¹⁴⁰

The increase of contact between King's College and the University of Louvain at the time of the Reformation may have several explanations. Firstly Louvain may have been the clearing-house for much of the literature and theology of the Catholic reform movement in which some members of the Aberdeen clerical establishment were interested. It had been the custom in the past for Aberdeen to turn to Louvain in times of crisis.¹⁴¹ The crisis of the Reformation may have prompted a re-affirmation of the value of this connection. Secondly Louvain offered a pleasant place of retirement for those who chose exile rather than conformity. It may even be the case that some of the staff of King's College took up temporary residence there in order to have leisure and freedom from external pressure so as to continue the fight against Protestantism. The practical effect was that the numbers of the academic staff at King's during the first years of the Reformation must have contracted. This, taken together with the damage the college suffered during the raid on it in 1560, may help to account for Randolph's description of it in 1562 as having only fifteen or sixteen students.¹⁴²

Despite its status as a small college King's posed a serious enough threat to Protestantism for it to be purged by the regent Moray in 1569 of the last representatives of the 1559 group of regents.¹⁴³

Aberdeen and the Provincial Councils

The Reformation of 1560 not only sealed the eventual fate of King's College but put an end to the very active movement for reform within the Catholic Church in Scotland. This movement is primarily associated with Archbishop John Hamilton of St Andrews, but it also had close links with the clergy of the diocese of Aberdeen. The involvement of the clerical establishment of Aberdeen in its development gave the movement much of its character, and the presence of Catholic reformers in Aberdeen helped to account for the comparative health of the diocese on the eve of the Reformation, as well as contributing to the relative longevity of its Catholic institutions.

One of the chief features of Hamilton's reforming programme was the attempt to ground the conciliar principle in the local church through the regular convocation of provincial councils. The council of 1547 was summoned with the definite purpose of reform and was not, unlike previous councils, primarily concerned with the raising of revenues.¹⁴⁴ It was also directed towards giving expression to a wider spread of opinion from within the clerical estate. This process of preparation, debate and promulgation of conciliar legislation formed an essential part of the development of a reformation party drawn from the ranks of the cathedral chapters and the universities. This party held firm until the crisis of 1560 and then broke ranks with some of its members, like John Winram and John Douglas, joining the ranks of the Protestant reformers, and others, like Alexander

Anderson, holding fast to the conservative cause. This movement for reform cannot be described as a counter-reformation since it is not quite clear what it was countering. The parameters of opposition to Catholicism in the 1540s and 1550s lacked definition, although they may be broadly described as Lutheran in inspiration.¹⁴⁵ The legislation of the Scottish provincial councils suggests that the focus of the Protestant attack was not so much papal authority, indulgences or the distinctions of justification by faith, but rather the sacraments of the Church, especially holy orders and the eucharist.¹⁴⁶ Legislation concerned with the moral reform of the clergy must therefore be seen in this context.

The theological tone of this native reform movement is alleged to have lain not along the lines of 'tridentine rigidity but along the more liberal line of modification in accordance with reforming thought'.¹⁴⁷ The apparent lack of concern with papal authority may have much to do with the interrelation of Church and State in Scotland. The papacy had never shown itself an enthusiastic supporter of reform in Scotland. The privilege conceded by Pope Innocent VIII to James III in 1478 which allowed him to nominate to vacant bishoprics and abbeys, together with the similar privilege granted to James V in 1535, was taken as one of the main causes of the main causes of negligence and lack of episcopal oversight complained of by both Protestant and Catholic reformers.¹⁴⁸ With the episcopate subverted and the crown and papacy working together for their own ends, it would have been difficult for Catholic reformers to base their platform on loyalty to the papacy. The members of the Catholic reform movement were not pre-occupied with the Petrine ministry, for them papal authority was simply one aspect of orthodoxy to be defended, and not the most important doctrine at

that. The attacks pressed by the Protestant reformers against the eucharistic understanding of the Catholic Church seem to have presented much more of a threat to the doctrinal integrity of the established Church.

The apparent moderation of Hamilton's reforming programme should not be construed as an earnest of 'ecumenical' intent on behalf of the Catholic party.¹⁴⁹ Indeed it is dangerous to fix the polarisation of 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' parties at too early a stage. It was by no means clear to conservatives that they were fighting a losing battle, and hopes for a Catholic revival endured at least until 1567. On the eve of the Reformation a provincial council was issuing decrees for reform, and members of the councils of 1549 and 1559 were to be found serving on commissions empowered to oversee moral reform amongst the higher clergy. A few months later some of these same men were to be instrumental in drawing up the First Book of Discipline.¹⁵⁰ Catholic reform and the first generation of Protestant reformers should not be seen as confronting one another in the closing years of the 1550s. There were definite ideological and personal links between both groups; they were subject to the same intellectual influence and, in some ways, were aiming at similar goals. The events of 1560 might not so much represent the victory of one party over another as a split within the ranks of a former Catholic reforming party. What appears as ecumenical and moderate intent in documents such as Hamilton's *Catechism* may be less a conscious expression of moderate doctrine and more of an accurate representation of the self-understanding of the Scottish Catholic Church.

The existence of a moderate party within Scottish Catholicism was implied by Knox in a description of the events of November 1558.

He wrote describing this group that:

They and their faction began to draw certain articles of reconciliation, promising unto us, if we should admit the Mass to stand in her former reverence and estimation ... that then would they grant us to pray and baptise in the vulgar tongue so that it were done secretly and not in open assembly.

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The central concern of this group was not the preservation of communion with Rome, but the protection of the position of the mass. This preoccupation was totally in accord with the spirituality of the Rhineland and the Low Countries with their intense concentration on eucharistic piety and devotion. It seems quite likely that what eventually split such a moderate party was not disagreement over the question of authority and hierarchy as disputes over the role and function of the eucharist in the life of a reformed Church.

The virulence of Knox and his colleagues against transubstantiation is well known. Even before 1560 the clergy were expressing concern that the eucharist was the focus of disrespect and attack by dissenters. In the various acts against the 'Lutherans' urged by the clergy or parliament, particular mention was made of the lack of reverence for the 'blessed sacrament of the altar'.¹⁵² In the north-east definite steps were taken to encourage devotion to the eucharist and the real presence in the sacrament. The activities of Alexander Galloway show an increased stress on the theological significance of the reservation of the sacrament which had developed in Scotland since the middle of the fifteenth century.¹⁵³ Galloway and his companion both on the chapter and the board of visitors of King's College in 1549, Alexander Spittal, played a leading part in promoting eucharistic piety. A number of sacrament houses in the north-east of Scotland, chiefly in the prebendal churches of Aberdeen cathedral,

were financed, and possibly even designed, by Galloway.¹⁵⁴

The stipulation in the 1549 visitation of King's College that a light should be kept burning before the sacrament was possibly inserted at Galloway's insistence.¹⁵⁵ Both Galloway and Spittal endowed their prebendal churches with elaborate sacrament houses,¹⁵⁶ and the continued devotion to the mass, seen in its semi-public celebration in the north-east until at least the end of the sixteenth century, may be a tribute to the success of their endeavours.¹⁵⁷

The order of devotional priorities within the popular mind is also revealed in the response made by Janet Knowles to the kirk session of Aberdeen in 1574. When asked to give confession of her faith she finally agreed to renounce 'papistrie' but claimed that she could in no way renounce the mass.¹⁵⁸

The centrality of the eucharist, in terms of the debate between Catholicism and emerging Protestantism in Scotland, was evident in the public disputations engaged in by the polemicists of both parties in the early stages of the Reformation. The subject fixed on in such debates was almost invariably the eucharist and not papal primacy. During the first flush of success of the lords of Congregation in July 1559 Ninian Winzet, the Linlithgow schoolmaster, engaged John Knox in debate on the Catholic doctrine of the eucharistic sacrifice.¹⁵⁹ In the summer of 1561 Winzet challenged the new superintendent of Lothian, John Spottiswoode, to dispute the same subject.¹⁶⁰ Also in 1561 a group of Aberdeen clergy, including Alexander Anderson, John Leslie and James Strachan, were summoned to Edinburgh to answer for their religious views; they engaged in public debate with a representative group of reformers on the eucharist.¹⁶¹ In the same year one of Queen Mary's preachers, the Dominican John Black, confronted his

former confrere, John Willock, on the subject of eucharistic theology, and the argument allegedly continued for two days.¹⁶² The same subject was chosen when Quentin Kennedy of Crossraguel encountered John Knox at Maybole in 1562.¹⁶³ When William Cranston was threatened with excommunication and forced out of the principalship of St Salvator's College at St Andrews it was for preaching in defence of orthodox eucharistic doctrine in the parish kirk.¹⁶⁴ The question on which the theological tide of the Reformation broke in Scotland was that of the eucharist.

Another concern of those who framed the legislation of the provincial councils, and also of those who drew up the First Book of Discipline, was the provision of proper ministerial oversight within the Church. The provincial councils attempted to convey a high theology of episcopacy whilst the First Book of Discipline adopts a much lower view of oversight. In the work of William Hay, former principal of King's College and one of an earlier generation of Catholic reformers, two contemporary views of the nature of the episcopate were succinctly decribed.¹⁶⁵ The low view, advocated by St Jerome and his school, proposed that there was a general parity within the sacrament of holy orders and that what distinguished the bishop from the priest was the jurisdiction possessed by the former. In other words the episcopate was of human rather than divine institution and was concerned simply with government.¹⁶⁶ The implication lying behind this view was that the structure and expression of the ministry of oversight could be altered in the interests of its proper function. This view seems to have featured amongst some of the members of the circle from which the First Book of Discipline emerged. The view to which Hay himself subscribed, and which underlies much of modern Catholic views of the nature of holy orders, was that the

episcopate was a distinct order of divine institution. The distinction between a bishop and a simple priest was of the order of ontology rather than jurisdiction. The office of bishop was indispensable in maintaining sound doctrine and morals within the diocese. Such a high theology of the bishop's office does not seem to have emanated from the bishops themselves but from a small group of reformers, mainly academics, who were responsible for framing the legislation of the councils. Some of this group later changed their allegiance and pursued their reforming work outside the fold of the Catholic Church.¹⁶⁷

The composition and representative status of clerical reforming groups may only be identified with reference to the wider composition of the provincial councils and the tone and content of the legislation they produced. Clearly the Hamilton influence predominated in most of the councils held during John Hamilton's occupancy of the primatial see. Many of the theologians present at those councils were linked either through patronage or in other ways to the primate. The diocese of St Andrews and its university were both strongly represented, but so also was the diocese of Aberdeen which had a fairly strong contingent at the 1549 council. Amongst those who had connections with Aberdeen and King's College was John Spittal, the rector of St Andrews university, who had originally taught canon law at Aberdeen and who later became part of the academic tide that flowed back and forth along the east coast.¹⁶⁸ As Official of the diocese of St Andrews Spittal associated himself with efforts to combat heresy in the years before 1560.¹⁶⁹ Similarly with John Sinclair who attended the 1549 council as dean of Restalrig. Sinclair's previous career had included a spell as regent in both laws at King's

College in 1537.¹⁷⁰ In later years he too was to lend his support to the campaign against heresy in St Andrews. In 1550 he visited Adam Wallace just before he went to the stake and asked him to confess his faith in the real presence.¹⁷¹ Sinclair retained some of his personal links with Aberdeen since he exchanged books with Bishop William Gordon in the 1550s. One of these was Ruard Tapper's edition of the articles devised at Louvain to illustrate the differences between Catholicism and Lutheranism.¹⁷² The diocese of Aberdeen was further represented by Alexander Anderson, the sub-principal of the university, Patrick Myreton, the archdeacon, and Arthur Telfer, one of the canons of the chapter.¹⁷³ One of the most striking absentees was John Bisset, the principal of King's College. His absence may reflect the peripheral position he held in the college and the correspondingly dominant position of Anderson.

The principal delegate from Aberdeen to the council of 1549 was William Gordon, the bishop of the diocese. His reputation was not such as to qualify him for the title of ardent reformer, but he could not be described as coarse or ill-educated. Despite his notoriety, he seems to have maintained some interest in the cause of Catholic reform, and even promoted it within his own diocese. Gordon had begun his studies at King's College in the days of Hector Boece.¹⁷⁴ On completing his studies there, and supported by one of the family benefices in the chapter of Moray, Gordon proceeded to Paris where he remained for some time.¹⁷⁵ Whilst there he formed part of a considerable colony of Scots who were to play an important part in the cause of reformation, both Catholic and Protestant, in the years to come. Amongst the Scots students in Paris at the time may be numbered George Buchanan, William Manderston, rector of the University of Paris,

Robert Wauchope, Catholic reformer and later Archbishop of Armagh, Robert Richardson, canon of Cambuskenneth and later convert to Protestantism, and John Douglas, who was to progress from the principalship of St Mary's College at St Andrews to the chancellorship and Protestant archbishopric of the same.¹⁷⁶ The intellectual influences operating in Paris at the time may be seen in the presence there of Guillaume Bude, John Calvin, Johannes Sturm, Mathurin Cordier, Salmon Macrin and Juan Gelida.¹⁷⁷ It was whilst at Paris that Gordon made contact with the Italian humanist who was to prove influential in Scotland through his work at the abbey of Kinloss, Giovanni Ferreri. Gordon's acquaintance with Ferreri was to endure and be expressed in correspondence long after the latter left Scotland.¹⁷⁸ After finishing his studies at Paris Gordon proceeded to Angers where he took his doctorate in both laws, thus completing the essential and ideal educational foundation for the ecclesiastical position he was to hold in Scotland.¹⁷⁹ That Gordon's interests were wider than the drinking and whoring ascribed to him by Spottiswoode may be adduced from a list of those books which survive from his personal library.

In total about fifty-seven printed books survive from Gordon's personal library.¹⁸⁰ The list gives no indication of the overall size of his book collection, neither is the fact that he owned them any guarantee that he read them or was familiar with their contents. However, the list of authors does imply that he was familiar with modern controversial works, as well as with classical and patristic authors. Gordon was more than a moderately well-educated cleric so it is no surprise to find the standard scholastic works of Peter Lombard and Albert the Great alongside the texts of Latin fathers like Irenaeus, Hilary of Poitiers and Gregory the Great, with the Greeks

being represented by John Chrysostom.¹⁸¹ The choice of editions of these works suggests that they were not simply text books but were chosen very carefully. The humanist tradition is represented by Erasmus' edition of the Contra Haereses of Irenaeus, and also volume three of Erasmus's Opera in an edition published at Basle.¹⁸² The overall shape of the remnant of Gordon's library implies that Leslie's description of him may be more apt than Spottiswoode's. Leslie described Gordon as 'ane Prelate of guid leving, fader broder to George than earl of Huntley, quhom the Cardinal be his labouris helpit to be promoved thairto, and preferred for his knawledge'.¹⁸³ The major influence in the formation of his 'knawledge' was French in character. Just over fifty-nine per cent of Gordon's surviving books were published in France, forty-five per cent originating in Paris and fourteen per cent in Lyons. Basle, at fifteen per cent, was the next most important source of supply, with Cologne following at about ten per cent and Louvain at five per cent.¹⁸⁴ The respective publication dates of the books are of some importance since they give an impression not only of Gordon's buying pattern but also of the various interests occupying his mind at different times during his life.

Broadly speaking the French books fall into two areas which can be identified with distinct periods in his life. Since his residence in France broadly coincided with that of Ferreri, he must have been a student there from about 1527 to 1533. Twenty of the titles that derive from his collection were published before the year 1533. On the whole these items are undistinguished consisting of standard works like Aristotle's Ethics, and Boethius' De Consolatione.¹⁸⁵ But even amongst these works some themes begin to emerge.

John Fisher's Assertionis Lutheranae Confutatio is found along with Sichardus' Antidotum Contra Haereses.¹⁸⁶ More surprising is the presence of a fascicule of Estienne's Bible published at Paris in 1532 and containing the books from the Song of Songs to the Apocalypse.¹⁸⁷ Two of these books were gifts from members of the Aberdeen ecclesiastical establishment. Robert Erskine, the dean of the chapter, and Alexander Anderson, the sub-principal of King's, appear to have exchanged books with the bishop from time to time.¹⁸⁸ Given the publication dates it seems likely that many of the books in this group may have been acquired during the bishop's first sojourn in France.

Gordon's second period of book acquisition coincided with his occupancy of the see of Aberdeen. There is a ten year gap in the series of publication dates in the run of his French volumes. The series ends in 1533 and begins again in 1543. Within that decade there is one volume originating in Strasbourg, a description of the Holy Land, a commentary on the Psalms, the letters of Erasmus, and an illustrated paraphrase of the Psalter.¹⁸⁹ Of the fifty-seven volumes surviving from the library thirty-one were published between 1543 and 1555, with one late arrival, a work published in 1568 and given to the bishop by Alexander Paip, an Aberdeen notary.¹⁹⁰ This implies that in the last fifteen years before the Reformation, a period when the Church was allegedly in decline and the bishop of Aberdeen given over to whoring and drunkenness, Gordon was actually procuring books from Paris, Louvain and Cologne in some quantity.

The books from the second period of the bishop's life fall into two categories. Those books published before 1550 emanated mainly from Paris, with the odd one or two from Basle; after 1550 the place

of publication was almost exclusively Louvain or Cologne. The range of titles shows Gordon's principal interests to have been biblical commentaries, of which there are about seven examples amongst the thirty-two volumes in this section, and controversial or apologetic works designed to meet the challenge of heresy, ancient or modern. There were about eleven works in this category. The biblical works are again almost entirely French in origin and date from before 1550, whereas the controversial works emerged from Germany or the Low Countries and date from after 1550. If this list is anything to go by at all then Gordon was inspired by the need for deeper biblical knowledge in the exercise of pastoral care of his diocese, as well as being aware of the need for informed opposition to Protestantism in the north-east of Scotland.

Bishop Gordon certainly appreciated the works of modern Catholic controversialists and apologists. It is not surprising to find a copy of Erasmus's Adages on the shelves of a cultivated cleric like Gordon.¹⁹¹ It is slightly more remarkable to find these balanced by the Opera of Latomus, one of Erasmus' principal opponents.¹⁹² The Louvain school was also represented by the Dominican exegete and Louvain inquisitor Johannes Henten, Gordon had a copy of his work on the epistles of St Paul.¹⁹³ Gordon also owned a copy of Ruard Tapper's Declaratio. Tapper, the former Inquisitor General of the Low Countries in 1537, was a former pupil of Pope Adrian VI and later taught at Louvain himself. His reputation was for the moderate and eirenic approach to the combatting of heresy through the use of logic, disputation and teaching rather than brute force and persecution.¹⁹⁴ Such methods were to feature in the Catholic response to Protestantism in Scotland after 1560. Tapper's book was an easy reference work for the controversialist since it placed the doctrinal

arguments of the Catholic Church alongside those of their opponents to illustrate their respective differences in an easily accessible way.¹⁹⁵ With Tapper and another work, the Adversus Omnes Haereses of Alfonso de Castro which Gordon also owned, the bishop was brought into association with the prominent European theologians who helped to determine the progress of the Council of Trent.¹⁹⁶ Castro was a valued councillor of Philip II and his Adversus Haereses went into five editions published from Paris, of which Gordon's was the last, being published in 1543.¹⁹⁷

A more significant representative of the Catholic reforming school amongst Gordon's books was an edition of the Catholic Catechism of Fredericus Nausea. Nausea's Catechism was originally published at Vienna in 1543; Gordon owned the 1551 edition published at Antwerp. He must have acquired it soon after its publication since it was definitely in his possession by 1554. At some time after this he presented it to Alexander Anderson.¹⁹⁸ Another continental link through theology was thus formed between the north-east of Scotland and the moderate German school of Catholic reformers, which included Hermann von Wied, archbishop of Cologne, Johannes Gropper, Julius Pflug and Nausea himself.¹⁹⁹ Georg Witzel, the fervent anti-Protestant and convert from Lutheranism was also of some interest to Gordon since he owned a number of his books.²⁰⁰ It seems quite likely that the bulk of these books were acquired by Gordon during his stay at Louvain, where he is recorded as having matriculated in 1551.²⁰¹

Careful examination of the recorded inscriptions in Gordon's books reveals that there was considerable traffic in printed works amongst the clerics of Old Aberdeen. Books were used to create, cement and articulate friendships and community of interest, as well as to

spread ideas. Durkan and Ross have referred to the presence in Aberdeen of 'an educated class whose members bought, exchanged and gave away books'.²⁰² From the various inscriptions and marginalia in his books it is evident that Gordon was part of this circle, which actually extended beyond Aberdeen to include Kinloss, Edinburgh and Glasgow.²⁰³ Thus over the years a number of books were passed on to Bishop Gordon by Alexander Anderson, including the 1545 edition of Erasmus's Contra Haereses and Henten's commentary on the Epistles of St Paul.²⁰⁴

Bishop Gordon appears to have continued his encouragement of the intellectual endeavours of others after the Reformation, since in 1565 he gave a new year's present of Folengo's 1547 edition of the Psalms to Master Alexander Skene.²⁰⁵ Skene was a graduate of King's College,²⁰⁶ a burghess of Aberdeen and Edinburgh,²⁰⁷ and one of the leaders of the Catholic party in the capital after 1560.²⁰⁸ However Gordon's bibliophile contacts extended far beyond Aberdeen, since influential works like Tapper's Declaratio found their way into the hands of John Sinclair, later bishop of Brechin.²⁰⁹ Robert Reid, bishop of Orkney, was another of Gordon's contacts and came into possession of some of his books.²¹⁰ During Gordon's absence at Louvain and Paris in 1551 Reid administered the see of Aberdeen.²¹¹ Moreover, Gordon, Reid, James Beaton of Glasgow and Sinclair, were all correspondents of Ferreri long after his departure from Scotland and, as Dr Durkan has observed, it was precisely these bishops who seem to have collected the most interesting libraries.²¹² Gordon was therefore part of that circle of humanists and cultivated clerics who retained their intellectual interests long after their studies abroad had finished, and who put their expertise to work in the direction of moderate reform at home.

Gordon's promotion to the see of Aberdeen in succession to the aged Bishop Stewart was undoubtedly intended as a consolidation of Gordon power in the north-east. Leslie attributed it to the influence of Cardinal Beaton, but it seems more likely that it was a token of the increasing convergence of interest between the houses of Gordon and Hamilton.²¹³ Certainly Gordon was obliged to allocate two pensions to associates of the earl of Arran, one being his son, John, and the other David Panter.²¹⁴ The vacant see of Aberdeen was part of the price Arran was prepared to pay for the earl of Huntly's support for the governor's plans to marry off his son to Queen Mary.²¹⁵ Despite his having been a 'political' appointment, which was not unusual in Scotland at the time, and considering his moral failings, it is of some significance that it was in the diocese of Aberdeen that the work of Catholic reform should have begun so consistently.

One of the most striking features of the Catholic reform movement in Scotland was not simply its links with continental reforming thought, but its awareness of the discussions continuing at the Council of Trent and the speed with which members of the movement were able to receive copies of the Tridentine legislation. In 1547 the bishop of Aberdeen together with his chapter admitted Master John Watson to a canonry of the diocese to exercise the function of special preacher.²¹⁶ The bishop excused himself from the task of preaching on the grounds that he was unable to perform it personally in all the churches of the diocese. However, the increase of heresy, the ignorance of the people, and the general hunger for the word of God demanded that learned men be set apart to preach, hear confessions and exercise the cure of souls. Apart from fulfilling this

role Watson was to function as a kind of canon theologian, lecturing in the cathedral twice a week and preaching to the people there once a month. During the rest of his time he was to make an annual visit to the common churches of the chapter of Aberdeen to preach there. Watson's appointment may be taken as some sign of the bishop's commitment to reform in the diocese, a task that he embraced soon after his elevation to the see.

Although Gordon had been provided to Aberdeen in May 1546, he was not consecrated until some date between 19 December 1546 and 26 January 1547.²¹⁷ Watson was admitted to his canonry on 9 July 1547, so that the bishop was only in full possession of his see for about six months before beginning to make provision for the proper pastoral care of the diocese. Watson's appointment is an example of just that kind of pastoral care and episcopal insight which is not usually associated with Bishop Gordon, but which was strenuously advocated by the Scottish provincial councils and the Council of Trent. Chapter one of the decree on reform promulgated by Trent in 1546 was the inspiration for the creation of a new post for John Watson.²¹⁸ In just under a year the decree had reached Aberdeen and was being implemented in the diocese before it appeared in any other part of Scotland where, for the most part, it remained a dead letter. The question then arises as to the means by which it reached Aberdeen.

The only Scots bishop to have attended the Council of Trent was Robert Wauchope, the archbishop of Armagh. Wauchope was not a member of the Scottish episcopal hierarchy but he was acquainted with many of the leading figures in the contemporary academic world, especially those who had studied at Paris where he had been a very

substantial figure for some time. After his promotion to the see of Armagh he was named to various Catholic commissions sent by Rome to engage in dialogue with the Lutherans. In this capacity he attended the Colloquy of Worms, where he won the favour of Cardinal Contarini. During the course of his work he encountered Bucer, Sturm and Melancthon, and was several times asked by the German bishops to spearhead the work of reform in their dioceses.²¹⁹ One of the chief features of such programmes was the practice of apologetic preaching which was later to be recommended by the Scottish provincial councils, and which was to find favour briefly after 1560.²²⁰ Wauchope did visit Scotland in 1548 and was quite probably there when the legislation of Trent was being incorporated into the canons of the provincial council of 1549.²²¹ He may therefore provide the link between the work of reform at Trent and its later counterpart in Scotland. However, his presence in 1548 would not account for the earlier appearance of the Tridentine decrees in Aberdeen in 1547.

A possible link between Aberdeen and Wauchope may exist in the person of his friend and associate, John Greenlaw of Haddington. Greenlaw undertook at least one mission to Scotland for Wauchope in 1540 when he was attempting to press his patron's claim to the commendatorship of Dryburgh.²²² In 1542 he was still Wauchope's secretary and chaplain and was so described by the Jesuits Salmeron and Broet who were passing through Edinburgh on their way to Ireland.²²³ Greenlaw actually knew John Watson of Aberdeen, and the period of their acquaintance may be fixed between 1546 and 1558. By 1558 Watson owned a copy of the Quinones breviary published at Lyons in 1546 which had been given to him by Greenlaw.²²⁴ It may be that Greenlaw was the channel through which the decrees reached Aberdeen, and he may have been personally involved in Watson's appointment there. Greenlaw

certainly knew other members of the Catholic reform movement in Scotland including Ninian Winzet and John Scot the Franciscan.²²⁵ Greenlaw was also an admirer of Quentin Kennedy's works since he copied out an unknown treatise on the eucharist by Kennedy in his own edition of the latter's Ane Compendius Tractive, published at St Andrews in 1558.²²⁶ That this was not simply for personal use is clear from the inscription on the title page which is similar to that which features on a number of other books owned by Greenlaw and his circle. The inscription reads 'Greynlawe hadingtonanus et amicorum'.²²⁷ Greenlaw's link with Kennedy, and his association with Watson and Scot, give access to another series of personal relationships which shows how small was the Scottish clerical and intellectual scene, and yet how wide were its international connections. This link was to be as influential on the development of Scottish Catholicism as any similar connections were to prove for Protestantism.

In the 1540s and 1550s Aberdeen was thus closely involved in the process for reform that was absorbing the attention of some of the higher clergy in Scotland. It was the first diocese in Scotland to attempt to implement the decrees of the Council of Trent and to initiate the wide programme of pastoral preaching recommended by the council.²²⁸ Members of the staff of King's College and the cathedral chapter were in touch with moves for reform taking place on the continent through the steady supply of theological books reaching the east coast from Germany, France and the Low Countries, and also through the intellectual contacts made during study abroad at Paris and Louvain.²²⁹ Both the diocese and the university were well represented at the provincial councils sponsored by archbishop Hamilton, and some of the Aberdeen clergy may have formed part of the commissions charged with framing the conciliar legislation.²³⁰ The work for reform was the

co-ordinated effort of academics from both St Andrews and Aberdeen. Significantly, a number of Aberdeen academics were incorporated in the university of St Andrews in 1551 when Hamilton's Catechism was being composed there; amongst these were Alexander Anderson, the sub-principal of King's College, and John Watson, the Tridentine preacher. William Cranston also accompanied them as did Richard Smith, the English refugee theologian.²³¹ However, the other major initiative for reform in the Aberdeen diocese in 1559 outlines some of the obstacles and opposition to change encountered by its proponents.

In January 1559 the canons of the cathedral chapter responded to a request made to them by the bishop for advice about the reformation of his diocese. By this time the Congregation had already been formed and religious rioting had taken place in Edinburgh. In some ways it might have appeared that the writing was on the wall for Catholicism in Scotland.²³² The tone and content of the advice he received shows how difficult it was for reformers to work without the co-operation of the bishop. Many of the suggestions made by the canons had first appeared in the legislation of the provincial council of 1549. The first two stipulations of the canons' letter attacked what were believed to be the two chief causes of religious decline in Scotland: clerical corruption and the general lack of preaching to be found throughout the country.²³³ The council of 1549 had begun its sessions by re-stating the canon against concubinage of the Council of Basle, and the canons' letter of advice to the bishop implied that this was still a pressing problem in Aberdeen.²³⁴ The letter ended with an exhortation to the bishop to show good example by 'removing and dischargeing himself of cumpany of the gentilwoman be quhom he is gretlie sclanderit'.²³⁵ The woman in question was Janet

Knowles who was to make such a brave show in defence of the mass before the kirk session of Aberdeen in later years.²³⁶ In giving such advice they must have been aware of their own shortcomings in this matter, since many of them were enjoying, or had enjoyed, irregular unions which had produced illegitimate children. Even those who were to be staunch in their support of Catholicism after 1560 were not exempt from this failing. Patrick Myreton appears to have been succeeded by a son in his benefice at Aberdeen and at Crail.²³⁷ James Strachan, the former rector of St Andrews University had a son who was presented to the parsonage of Botarie.²³⁸ Arthur Telfer, parson of Crimond, had at least four sons, all of whom were later legitimated.²³⁹ Even Alexander Anderson had at least two sons, James and Alexander.²⁴⁰ The advice to the bishop may sound a little hollow coming from men such as these. It certainly did not represent the opinions of committed reformers who were above reproach themselves.

Clerical immorality was only one part of their platform; the other concerned the work of preaching throughout the diocese, and the measures to be adopted against heretics. The council of 1549 had provided for the establishment of some form of inquisitorial body to be established in each diocese. To remedy this lacuna in the diocese of Aberdeen the canons proposed Masters Nicholas Hay, Thomas Fraser Alexander Paip and Robert Lumsden be involved in this tribunal. Hay taught at King's College and since he conformed in 1569 to the Confession of Faith he was allowed to retain his post.²⁴¹ Lumsden's orthodoxy may also be questioned since, although he was legal adviser to the bishop, he also became a prominent member of the kirk session of Aberdeen in 1562.²⁴² Alexander Paip continued his practice after 1560 and stood at the head of a consistently recusant family

that continued into the seventeenth century.²⁴³ It is difficult to see how effective such a commission of inquisition could be under such circumstances. It represented too little too late. Already the heretical threat had increased in scope by 1559; the threat was more insidious and harder to tackle because of its appearance in the ranks of the leading men of the region, even featuring amongst the bishop's own retinue.²⁴⁴

The last provincial council to be held in Scotland before the Reformation met in Edinburgh in March 1559. During its meetings it was able to frame and re-state previous legislation with greater precision and efficiency, and again the work of framing the legislation was probably the work of a small commission.²⁴⁵ The legislation of the 1559 council displays exactly the same concerns as the canons' letter of advice to their bishop in January of the same year: anxieties about the reformation of morals, greater preaching in the parishes and the combatting of heresy.²⁴⁶ This suggests that the pattern of religious life in Aberdeen was broadly similar to that experienced in the rest of the country. Although the mood was sober it did not lack optimism since the fathers of the provincial council of 1559 fixed the date for their next meeting in February 1560, by which time events had escaped the control of the Catholic party.²⁴⁷

In the last twenty years before the Reformation the late medieval Catholic establishment in Aberdeen strove desperately to reform itself, attempting to absorb the shocks of the new learning and the Protestant challenge. Its involvement in the local and national politics of the country inevitably established a pattern of counter-influence against which any reforming party had to work. In the end the last bastions of Catholicism in the north-east were

not the university and the cathedral chapter, but the families of the burgess elite which controlled the burgh of Aberdeen. This fact in itself is a tribute to the pastoral ministry of the local clergy and suggests that the Catholic reforming movement which took root in Aberdeen was not without its successes.

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CHAPTER FOUR

The impact of the Reformation on the burgh community.

In 1560 the burgh of Aberdeen was well provided with ecclesiastical institutions; no citizen of the burgh was out of sight or sound of some religious building. The two hills dominating the town were crowned by chapels dedicated to St Ninian and St Katherine. The former, on the Castlehill had been built by the town within the ruined ramparts of the castle after the wars of independence.¹ St Katherine's Chapel was under the patronage of a local family who had held the office of constables of Aberdeen.² At the heart of the burgh, in the Broadgate, stood the Observantine Franciscan friary founded in 1469 and endowed with a new church by Bishop Gavin Dunbar in 1518.³ On the southwestern edge of the town lay the more ancient foundation of the Trinitarians with its gardens stretching down to the banks of the Dee.⁴ Whilst along the western boundary of the burgh stretched a line of churches and friaries, including the Carmelite house in the Green, the parish kirk of St Nicholas and, on the high ground at the top of the Schoolhill, the Dominican priory.

Additional evidence of the piety and generosity of local patrons could be seen in the various hospitals and almshouses both in and outside the burgh. Within the precincts of the parish church lay St Thomas's Hospital and, just beyond the southern boundary of the burgh, another hospital for the poor and infirm had been founded in the twelfth century.⁵ In the open country between Aberdeen and Old Aberdeen there was a leper hospital, and in the small village of Fuddy, on the eastern side of the harbour, lay a chapel of ease of the parish kirk dedicated to St Clement,⁶ and St Anne's almshouse for poor ladies.⁷

All of these institutions formed part of the rich pattern of foundation, endowment and patronage which linked each constituent part of local society, magnate and bishop, canon and laird, burgess, crafts-

man and chaplain. Aberdeen was a regional capital, a busy trading port, and a centre of ecclesiastical government and clerical education. Its churches and priories, hospitals and schools were not simply part of the social cement that bound the community together. They were the outward and visible expressions of the interior unarticulated relationships on which that society was based. The visibility of the Church was even more pronounced in the burgh of Old Aberdeen which, thanks to the activities of Bishop Elphinstone, was almost exclusively an ecclesiastical settlement. The cathedral, the university and the collegiate church of King's College, offered ample scope for clerical patronage and the pursuit of an ecclesiastical or academic career. Moreover, the Church not only possessed a considerable amount of investment in the form of land, it was also a major employer in the area.

It has been proposed that there may have been as many as 150 clergy in the combined burghs of Aberdeen in the mid-sixteenth century.⁸ Of these the majority would have been concentrated in Old Aberdeen, where there were about 60 attached to the cathedral and 22 involved in King's College. Estimates as to the size of the populations of the two burghs vary. Professor Donaldson has suggested 500 for Old Aberdeen with 6,000 for New Aberdeen in 1500,⁹ whereas other figures put it at nearer 3,600 at the time of the Reformation.¹⁰ Even allowing for a fair degree of overlap between the staffs of the various institutions, and for non-residence, the proportion of clerics to other inhabitants of the burghs must have been high, perhaps as high as one in four of the adult population in Old Aberdeen.¹¹

Most of these ecclesiastical corporations were deeply rooted in the local community. A large number of Aberdeen names appear amongst the benefice holders in both burghs. Bissets, Andersons, Lesleys, Colli-

sons, Cullens, Grays, Menzies and Vauss all feature in the clerical and political establishments. Some of them are also to be found amongst the mendicant friars, even, occasionally, acting as procurators and agents for their relations within the burgh. In 1551 Alexander Whitecross, a Trinitarian friar, was engaged in a property dispute with his mother.¹² John Lesley, a Carmelite member of the family of Lesley of Balquhain, is found disposing of property in the burgh in 1549.¹³ Friar Alexander Menzies is referred to as the last minister of the Trinitarian friary in 1576 when its revenues and lands are granted to Thomas Nicholson.¹⁴ This transaction had the advantage of keeping the property within the family, since Nicholson was the son-in-law of Thomas Menzies, the provost of Aberdeen.¹⁵ It was clear that any reformed settlement would affect more than the benefice holders and the occupants of religious houses; ties of kinship and family relationship ensured that it would touch all sectors of society.

The focus of ecclesiastical life within the burgh was the parish kirk of St Nicholas, the largest parish kirk in Scotland, with thirty two altars and sixteen chaplains. Gordon of Rothiemay said of it: 'there is no church so neat and bewtifull to be seen in Scotland'.¹⁷ The burgesses of Aberdeen had invested considerable pride as well as financial resources in it. The fifteenth century had been its time of greatest growth. Twenty three of the altars had been founded in the years 1431-1524, and only five of those after 1500. St Nicholas had also formed part of Elphinstone's plan to make his diocese a model of church government and religious practice, a scheme in which the burgesses were willing collaborators. In 1498 a new choir had been completed and around the same time Elphinstone approved new statutes for the college of chaplains.¹⁸ The choir was lavishly furnished and equipped with

new stalls carved by a local wright, John Fendour.¹⁹ The provision of new vestments and altar furniture for the choir in 1514 was the last major work embarked on by the council.²⁰ Yet in later years they were not to neglect their role as patrons and supervisors of the life of the kirk. Great attention was paid to the maintenance of 'godlie service', and the chaplains were occasionally called to account for the vestments and altar furnishings of the foundations they served.²¹ The scholars of the Sang School received their weekly board with the leading members of the council,²² and when the time came for them to proceed to further studies at the university they were often offered pensions to support them while they were there, in the hope that they would return to serve as chaplains when opportunity arose.²³ A strong sense of local identity and pride of place was planted in the clergy, and they were left in no doubt that they were burgh servants.

The close links between the burgh, local landed families, and the parish church are clearly seen in the foundations of altars and in the names of the chaplains who served them. Apart from the spiritual benefits derived from the foundation of a chaplaincy, a benefactor could provide useful employment for a member of his own family who had chosen the clerical life. When Andrew Gray endowed the chaplaincy of St Barbara in 1509, he opened the way for a number of Grays to serve it.²⁴ His son, Master Robert Gray, a doctor of medicine, held the office until 1557 when he was succeeded by his nephew Master Andrew Gray.²⁵ The Holy Blood Altar was under the patronage of the Cullen family and held until 1560 by Master Andrew Cullen, vicar of Aberdeen,²⁶ while a succession of Menzies occupied the chaplaincy of St Peter,²⁷ a succession which was not broken by the Reformation. In 1572 the chaplain, Master Edward Menzies, endowed Paul Menzies, son of Master Thomas Menzies of Durno

and grandson of the provost, with the chaplaincy in order to sustain him while he studied for a clerical career.²⁸ Since Master Thomas was at this time a Catholic sympathiser it is unlikely that he intended his son to enter the service of the Reformed church.²⁹ It may also be a sign of the times that Master Edward Menzies did not encourage his own illegitimate son to consider a future in the church but apprenticed him instead to a baker.³⁰

The town council held the patronage of most of the altars in the parish church, which offered them the opportunity of rewarding burgh servants; the master of the grammar school, the master of the sang school, and the town clerk depute all held chaplaincies within the parish kirk.³¹ The council was generous in rewarding its faithful employees; a number of benefices were given to Master John Kennedy, the clerk depute, and Sir Robert Bynne, chaplain of St Michael's altar, was given eight marks so that he could go to Flanders to seek medical treatment for his failing eyesight.³² On the other hand indolence and irresponsibility were not tolerated; the council expected value for money. In 1550 Master John Chalmer was appointed master of the grammar school³³ only to be dismissed three years later for his negligence.³⁴ He was allowed to enjoy the revenues of his chaplaincy for another four years before being discharged as a 'wayster' in 1557.³⁵

The craftsmen also had an interest in the parish kirk where they maintained their own altars and chaplains. In 1495 the cordiners had founded their altar of St Crispin and St Crispianus, and endowed the chaplain with £2 a year.³⁶ The hammermen were patrons of St Eloy's altar which had been granted to them by the council in 1472.³⁷ Their rights of patronage were limited however, since the council had to approve any chaplain appointed by them. Nevertheless the altar still acted as a

focus for the piety and devotion of the craft as well as contributing to its corporate sense of identity and distinction. The craftsmen regarded their altars with a proprietorial air; even after 1560 they considered themselves to retain certain rights which did not revert to the town. In 1564 the smiths petitioned the council to be allowed to collect the revenues of St Eloy's altar, which amounted to just over two pounds a year, wishing to distribute these amongst the poor members of their craft.³⁸ The council agreed to the petition provided that the distribution should be arranged with the consent of the council. This assertion of their ultimate patronage of the altar provoked the angry protest of the goldsmiths who claimed that they were the founders and therefore the principal patrons of the altars.³⁹ The resulting conflict shows something of the problems caused by the Reformation to the various interlocking sectors of burgh society.

The problem had arisen through the recent death of the last chaplain, John Goldsmith. He had served the parish church since at least 1522.⁴⁰ Despite his advanced age he, like the other incumbents, was threatened with the loss of financial support should he decline to attend the prayers and preaching in St Nicholas after 1560.⁴¹ Although some of the chaplains seem to have been willing to comply with this requirement, Goldsmith does not appear to have been one of them. However, the town, in consideration of his long service and that he was old and infirm and had been a member of the church staff 'sen his youtheid', granted him a pension of six merks a year.⁴² Evidently this pension was not enough to support him, and before his death he had alienated some of the annual rents belonging to the chaplaincy to the tenants to raise cash. The hammermen were thus faced with the prospect of the permanent alienation of the endowment of their altar. Naturally they were anxious to

retain the revenues of their investment and, understandably, the tenants proved equally concerned to maintain their hold on their newly acquired property. In their turn the goldsmiths were reluctant to see their rights absorbed by the council.⁴³

The council were faced with co-ordinated opposition to their claims as patrons of the altar, opposition which seems to have disconcerted them. In the resulting case three of the tenants of the chaplaincy claimed that nothing had been shown to prove that the council had undoubted right to the patronage and therefore they were not entitled to delegate James Hunter, the deacon of the hammermen, to collect the revenues for them.⁴⁴ The dispute became a test case between the alleged patrons, the council, and the tenants, with the unfortunate administrators, the hammermen caught in the middle. Eventually the council was forced to withdraw their commission from Hunter and reimburse him for the expenses he had incurred in the matter. The Master of the Kirk Work was ordered to collect any revenues that accrued from deceased chaplains until a more general settlement of the problem should be reached.⁴⁵ The council was thus forced to compromise and admit that it did not have undisputed sway over the disposal of the revenues of the old Church within its jurisdiction. For some years after 1560 patrons of altars were still involved in the affairs of the various foundations in St Nicholas. It was not until 1596 that the patron of St Salvator's altar finally relinquished his rights to it into the hands of the council.⁴⁶

The parish kirk had also been the focus of endowment and benefactions by families living outside the burgh. They too retained an interest in the fabric and finances of the kirk. The Irvines of Drum had founded the chaplaincy of St Ninian in 1456⁴⁷ and members of the family

were customarily buried in the south transept.⁴⁸ Another notable family, the Lesliees of Balquhain, were patrons of the altar of the Three Kings, a devotional importation from northern Germany. Perhaps not surprisingly the chaplain was also a Leslie, Master Andrew.⁴⁹ In 1551 there were two Lesliees amongst the chaplains, Master Andrew and John Leslie, later bishop of Ross.⁵⁰ John remained a Catholic but Andrew eventually modified his opposition to the Reformation in 1563 when he agreed to attend the services in St Nicholas' church.⁵¹

The university too had its representation amongst the chaplains of St Nicholas. The chaplaincy of St Mary Magdalen was customarily held by the bursar in Civil Law at King's College. Master Hector Myrton held it until 1563, having been presented in July 1518.⁵² The successor to both was Master John Kennedy, the town clerk depute.⁵³ This promotion represented a consolidation of the links between the Catholic establishments in both burghs. It met with the approval of the Catholics on the staff of King's College since their names are found on the document of confirmation. Such contacts were further strengthened when Kennedy was appointed to the parsonage of Tullynessle and a prebendary of the cathedral.⁵⁴ Thus Kennedy, who was at the heart of the burgh, brought together in his person the three principal influences on Aberdeen life - the town council, the university and the diocese. Despite the fact that he was prepared to attend services in the parish church he was found to be acceptable company by the bishop. In 1569 he was confirmed in receipt of an annual pension of 100 marks from Bishop Gordon.⁵⁵ It may have been this close association between Kennedy and the Catholic stronghold of Old Aberdeen that was a cause of some concern to the earl of Moray and the privy council in 1568. In that year Kennedy was summoned to answer certain charges before the council. He was charged in

company with the other leading members of the establishment in Old Aberdeen. However, he managed to convince the privy council of his loyalty and all process of horning against him was suspended.⁵⁶ Nevertheless he still received his pension from the bishop.

The various members of the clerical establishment were not simply to be found serving the spiritual needs of the people, then, but appeared in all walks of life. Master Thomas Annand, one of the chaplains of St Nicholas', maintained a successful legal career pleading in both civil and ecclesiastical courts.⁵⁷ John Collison, another chaplain and later subchanter of the cathedral, undertook legal and commercial work for his fellow chaplains, even agreeing to travel to Rome in 1554 on behalf of Master Andrew Cullen, the vicar of Aberdeen.⁵⁸ Master Edward Menzies, another of the chaplains, engaged in a small amount of trade which was facilitated by his family connections.⁵⁹ Master Robert Gray, chaplain of St Barbara's altar, was a doctor of medicine.⁶⁰

The chaplains therefore formed a sizeable proportion of the burgh establishment. They were involved with their flocks on several levels apart from the religious. Neither did they live apart from them but amongst them on fairly close terms. They did not occupy a close around the parish kirk which somehow managed to preserve something of a cloistered atmosphere, but in houses or chambers scattered throughout the town. Not unnaturally relations were sometimes strained; since the chaplains depended for part of their incomes on revenues or small annual rents and allowances, they sometimes found themselves involved in litigation with their flocks.⁶¹ Such incidentals of social life should not be taken as examples of pressure for religious reformation amongst the people. Some of the craft chaplains received their support from the leading men of the craft, travelling from house to house in turn to

receive their board.⁶² The events of 1560 posed a considerable problem to such an arrangement. More serious was the continuous residence of the clergy in the burgh after 1560. Unlike many other burghs Aberdeen did not expel its non-conforming clergy, but allowed them to remain in the town. Expulsion would have been a difficult enterprise, taking into account the family ties that existed between the inhabitants of the burgh and the chaplains; most of them were natives of Aberdeen and many had powerful relatives and friends on the town council. The general impression of Aberdeen in the mid-sixteenth century is of a fairly unadventurous orthodoxy, content with the practice of medieval religion. Catholicism was not in serious decline, neither does there seem to have been any widespread apathy. The events of 1560 came as a severe shock to this community and were not widely welcomed. A valiant but discreet rearguard action was fought to preserve as much as possible of the old ways. The progress of the Reformation was indubitably impeded by the widespread survival of Catholic belief and practice fostered by the conciliatory attitudes of a powerful burgess elite that governed the burgh.

The appearance of protestant opinion before 1560 in Aberdeen is on the whole infrequent and insignificant. The evidence presented to the contrary in favour of a nascent and gradually expanding reforming movement is generally unconvincing. In 1521 the master of the grammar school, John Marshall, had expressed doubts about papal supremacy, but even he had been allowed two years to consider the matter and change his mind.⁶³ A decade later Alexander Dick, a member of the Franciscan community, declared himself a convert and embraced the new teachings. The reaction of the people of Aberdeen can be judged by his having to flee to the more bracing protestant air of Dundee.⁶⁴

A more serious threat to orthodoxy was presented by the importation

of protestant literature by way of the east coast ports. The printing press was a powerful medium for spreading reforming doctrines, and James V was well aware of the danger. In 1525 the King wrote to the sheriff of Aberdeen ordering that the entry of heretical books by way of the port should be inhibited.⁶⁵ Ten years later all of the east coast burghs were ordered to be especially vigilant in guarding against cargoes of Lutheran books, especially those translated into Scots.⁶⁶ Such legislation only points out the danger; it does not give any idea as to the character, composition or even location of possible dissenting communities.

The ports were also a means of entry for Catholic reforming works. The schools of Cologne and the Low Countries were represented on the shelves of Aberdeen libraries. Apart from scholastic textbooks and classical authors, the personal collection of Alexander Anderson, sub-principal of King's College, consisted of works by Erasmus, John Eck, one of Luther's earliest opponents, and, most interestingly of all perhaps, the Catholic Catechism of Bishop Fredericus Nausea.⁶⁷ All of these books were printed on the continent and found their way to Scotland by means of the trading contacts existing between Aberdeen and northern Europe. This trade did not cease in 1560. Anderson and the former prior of the Carmelites, John Failford, were still receiving books from the Low Countries in the late 1560s and early 1570s. If protestant literature was so acceptable in Aberdeen it is difficult to see why it bore such little fruit. Instead the town was an active centre of Catholic reforming activity which is reflected in the fact that the principal apologetists for Catholicism after 1560 were all members of the Aberdeen school of clerics and theologians. Anderson, John Lesley, James Strachan and Patrick Myreton were all summoned to

dispute on the subject of the eucharistic doctrines of the Catholic Church with the protestant representatives at Edinburgh in 1561.⁶⁸ Catholicism was not under siege in Aberdeen, indeed it was probably stronger and more articulate there than in any other part of the country. The diocese of Aberdeen had been the first in Scotland to set about the decrees of the Council of Trent and to draw up a plan of Catholic reform.⁶⁹ It cannot be argued that Aberdeen was ripe for reformation in 1560, indeed such reformation as there was came about largely through the pressure of external political circumstances, combined with the activities of a small but influential group of protestant sympathisers within the burgh.

The events of 1559-1560 show something of the strengths and weaknesses of the forces ranged on either side of the religious divide, as well as the dilemma faced by the burgesses caught between an instinctive conservatism and a determination to maintain their privileges and freedom of action. The burgess elite had no desire to repeat the history of 1543-1545, when a brief flirtation with protestantism had led to the fall of the Menzies from power. Having carefully re-established their position, the Menzies family and their followers were reluctant to throw it away in a cause whose outcome was uncertain. They were willing to ally with the local magnates to delay the course of reformation but not willing to become their satellites, or to be caught in the middle of a struggle for power between rival aristocratic camps.

It is characteristic of the Reformation in Aberdeen to have been slow to take initiatives. The burgesses, especially those who controlled the council, seem always to have been responding to the negative influence coming from Edinburgh and Dundee. The party of government was as strong or as weak as its support in the localities. In Aberdeen

successive central administrators had been hampered by the absence of a strong local party to represent its interests. This was no less true of the lords of Congregation than any other ruling party before them. For their part the town council were determined to ensure that the disorder which had accompanied the changes in the southern burghs should not erupt in Aberdeen. They were also determined not to be dominated by a volatile, factious and radical ministry intent on pushing them further in the direction of reformation than they wished to go. The motto of the majority of the council in 1560 was 'no change' and when that proved impractical they opted for as little change as possible.

During the critical last half of 1559 the burgh attempted to preserve a studied neutrality, and remained away from the vigorous marching and counter-marching of the lords of Congregation and the Queen Regent. Their distance from a drama that was taking place elsewhere gave them the opportunity to reflect on events, and produce a measured response to them. News of the iconoclastic rioting in Perth, Dundee and Stirling prompted many clerics to take precautionary measures in case Aberdeen should be the victim of a similar visitation. The Dominican and Carmelite friars began to put away in safe keeping their various properties and endowments from May of 1559. They entrusted them to the care of sympathetic burgesses in the hope of reclaiming them once the emergency had passed.⁷⁰ In June the chaplains of St Nicholas' gave the vestments and altar plate of the parish kirk into the custody of the town council until order should be re-established.⁷¹ With John Knox installed as minister of St Giles' in July and the Congregation in possession of Edinburgh, the bishop of Aberdeen felt sufficiently alarmed to divide the episcopal treasury amongst his canons and his nephew, the earl of Huntly, lest it prove a temptation to his acquisi-

tive neighbours.⁷² During the earlier crisis of 1544 his predecessor, William Stewart, had been robbed of his treasure by Forbes of Corsindae as he attempted to protect it from a potential English invasion.⁷³ Alexander Anderson was also aware of the threat from the south and in later years he was accused of having followed the friars' example in alienating the revenues of King's College in order to avoid their falling into protestant hands.⁷⁴

The disposition of the episcopal treasury in July 1559, together with the protective measures undertaken by the chaplains of St Nicholas and the town council with their church property, points out the direction of the protestant threat to have been external not internal. Meanwhile within the burgh, there are no recorded instances of attacks on clergy or church buildings. During these months, the burgh waited on the outcome of events in the south. The chaplains showed a clear sense of optimism at the end of October when they asked for access so that they could resume their round of liturgical duties.⁷⁵ News of the difficulties faced by the Congregation, together with reports of the growing strength of French opposition, may have prompted the chaplains to make their request. Soon after the evacuation of Edinburgh by the lords and the re-establishment of Catholic worship in November 1559, the Aberdeen council ordered extensive repairs to the parish kirk. By this time they obviously felt confident that the town had escaped the chaos which had affected Edinburgh and the other east coast burghs.⁷⁶

The first serious attempt to involve Aberdeen in the maelstrom of national politics came in December 1559, and although it was not entirely unexpected, its advent was something of a shock. On 29 December 1559 the provost, Thomas Menzies of Pitfodells, warned the town of an imminent attack to be made on the religious houses by men from Angus and

the Mearns.⁷⁷ The nature of this enterprise is not entirely clear, and its timing curious; the tide seemed to be turning against the lords of Congregation. The assault may have been prompted by resentment at the burgh's lack of involvement in the struggle against France, together with a determination to implicate the town in the reforming efforts of the Congregation. The lords were certainly in need of further support in the country; already many of their adherents had begun to waver, including the indecisive Duke of Chatelherault.⁷⁸

Thomas Menzies, the provost of Aberdeen, viewed the northward advance of protestantism with considerable anxiety. He rightly sensed in this advance a threat to the established social order. His interest lay not simply in defending the interests of the Catholic Church, but also in preserving the political stability of Aberdeen which was closely bound up with the destinies of about eighteen prominent families. Some impression of the relative strengths of the various parties within the burgh may be gained from an examination of the lists of those who served as bailies during these years. In the period 1556-1569 twenty-seven men served on the council. Of these twenty-seven, three died in office and were immediately succeeded by their sons. These twenty-seven were drawn from the ranks of thirteen Aberdeen families. Fourteen of the twenty-seven served without interruption throughout the period, one served only one term, and two were added to the council in 1562, both of them sons-in-law of the provost, and a further two in 1567. It becomes immediately apparent that the burgh was ruled by substantially the same people before the Reformation as afterwards. After the Reformation power became increasingly concentrated in a small inner grouping within the oligarchy. There was some degree of mobility in the ranks of the bailies before 1560, but this

mobility ceased after that year. From 1563 to 1569 only five men held the office of bailie; two of them were sons of the provost, two were sons-in-law and the other, Master George Middleton, was married to a Catholic and in 1559 had objected to the association of Aberdeen with the Congregation. The Reformation prompted the Menzies to tighten their grip on the government of the burgh and paradoxically increased their power.

This impression is confirmed by a closer examination of the list of office holders during the crucial years 1559-1563. In the period 1547-1560 sixteen men served as bailies. Of these sixteen five held the office for a combined total of sixty times out of a possible total of ninety-two. This implies that there was a measure of stability amongst the bailies with the same men holding the position in a form of rota. The elections of 1559-1560 are something of an exception to this pattern. In 1559 a number of surprise names appear, prompted by the threat of religious disturbances. In that year the only bailie with a measure of experience was David Mar who had held the post since 1549. His colleagues were less well provided for, two of them, Master Patrick Rutherford and Master Thomas Nicholson, were comparative newcomers. Rutherford had been a bailie only once before in 1549. Nicholson had appeared on the council in 1549 but had become a bailie only two years before in 1557. The fourth bailie, John Lawson, was a complete newcomer; he had succeeded his father on the council in 1557 and shot to prominence as a bailie in 1559.⁷⁹ Rutherford and Lawson replaced Master George Middleton and Patrick Menzies, both of them members of the conservative faction. At the elections of 1559 the Menzies, for whatever reason, seem to have suffered a temporary eclipse.

Some weeks after the elections, on December 29 1559, the provost announced that the town was to be the victim of an iconoclastic raid intended to draw it into the orbit of the Congregation. He described this threat as 'express contrar the will and mynd of the authorite' and 'manifest tressoun'. In order to dissociate himself from this and to promote resistance within the town, he took legal instruments on his protest. He was joined in his resolution by nine others, seven of whom were members of the council. The group included three members of the Menzies family, Master George Middleton, Gilbert Colli-son, the Master of the Kirk Work, and Alexander Chalmer. The two burgesses who were not councillors were Andrew Buk, who had recently married the provost's daughter, and Alexander Leslie, a wealthy litster. Ranged against them were the four bailies and the remaining four members of the council.⁸⁰ The projected assault by the men of Angus and the Mearns was the catalyst that revealed the division of opinion on the council and brought forward that dissension that the provost and his associates feared most.

Experience elsewhere in Scotland had shown that in systems of administration where authority rested on force of character and where loyalty was personal, religious conflict could tear great rents in the fabric of what was hitherto accepted. With the past history of 1543-1545 to reflect on, the conservative burgesses feared most the coalition of the small body of local protestants and the volatile strength of the Congregation. In order for the oligarchy to retain control of events, a unification of internal and external threats had to be avoided. Menzies hoped to retain order, prevent treason and above all to leave no opening for the 'rascal multitude' to be manipulated into riot as in other burghs.

The burgh had five days grace before the attack came, which allowed time for appropriate action to be taken by those most threatened. The prior of the Black friars had time to assemble the property rentals and writs of the Dominican convent and transport them to safety, possibly to the house of the earl of Atholl.⁸¹ He was then able to withdraw and continue his activities on behalf of Catholicism by accepting a canonry of Dunkeld from Bishop Crichton,⁸² acting as one of the Catholic preachers sponsored by Mary, Queen of Scots along with John Roger the warden of the Grey friars,⁸³ and finishing his career by involving himself in espionage on behalf of the Queen's party during the Civil War.⁸⁴

The Franciscan community attempted to preserve their friary by surrendering it into the hands of the town council with the stipulation that should the Queen restore the houses of the religious orders they should once more enjoy their property.⁸⁵ The reaction of the residents of the Carmelite and Trinitarian friaries is not known, but some of them were to be found in later years living in the town. The most famous of the friars to remain in Aberdeen was John Failford, former prior of the Carmelites.⁸⁶

The properties of the friars offered a temptation to the acquisitive ambitions of some of the burgesses. The most alluring prospect was the Blackfriars with a minimum income of £108, followed by the Carmelites with £96 and the Trinitarians with £54.⁸⁷ The only valuable assets of the Franciscan friary lay in its site and the materials of its construction. Many of the burgesses were already involved in the financial administration of the Friars' lands, holding tacks and interests in certain of their crofts.⁸⁸ It is not surprising that some of them should have wished to go further and absorb more of the lands of the

religious houses. It was clearly in the interest of those who wished for a share in the spoils to see the religious troubles spread to Aberdeen.

One interested party in this respect was Master Duncan Forbes. He too must have had some forewarning of the imminent attack on Aberdeen. Soon after the Franciscans had quit their house he obtained a grant from Mary of Guise of Black, White and Grey friars lands, a license which was confirmed by Queen Mary in 1561.⁸⁹ Forbes is a good example of the arriviste who sensed the personal advantages that could accrue from a judicious manipulation of religion and politics.

Forbes was the grandson of the second Lord Forbes and a younger son of William Forbes of Corsindae. He had been elected to the council in 1549 and was to remain on it more or less without interruption until his death. After 1549 he followed a course of action designed to secure his place amongst the patrician elite that administered the burgh. The lands and buildings of the priory of Monymusk offered him the opportunity of acquiring a rural estate.⁹⁰ Although his ambition was partly satisfied when he gained the office of bailie in 1561, he was prevented from realising his claim to the friars' property by the council.⁹¹ The legal process dragged on until 1574 when Forbes was still pressing his suit with the Regent Morton. He was simultaneously dissociating himself from the support that the town had given to Huntly during the Civil War.⁹² Morton eventually accepted that Forbes opposed the Gordons, and he was exempted from the fine levied on the burgh.⁹³ It was men like Forbes, who combined dynastic ambitions with openness to the Reformation, who presented the internal threat to the stability of the burgh.

The arrival of the southern mob on 4 January prompted an emergency meeting of the council. The attacks on the friaries were actually

taking place while the council was in session.⁹⁴ The Black and White friars' houses would have been the first religious houses the rioters encountered on their way into the burgh from the Bridge of Dee. Mar's speech to the council gave the impression that substantial damage had not yet taken place, although the interior of the houses had been plundered. It was suggested that the buildings and revenues of the friars should be taken over by the town and applied to its own use. Since the arrival of the men from the south had prompted some of the townspeople to join them, it was feared that the council would find itself outmanoeuvred and no longer in control of the situation.

David Mar may have had another purpose in mind in convening this meeting. The threat from the mob was not the only consideration prompting the emergency meeting, it seemed to have been designed as a kind of coup to replace the Catholic establishment of Aberdeen with a Protestant one almost overnight. Mar had chosen his moment well, since the provost and six other members of the council, all of whom had expressed their opposition to the Congregation on 29 December, were out of the town.⁹⁵ In their absence Mar seized the opportunity to push through a fairly comprehensive programme of legislation diverting the revenues of the friars to the support of protestant preachers and the military endeavours of the Congregation. The language expressing this purpose is taken more or less directly from the vocabulary of the various bands of of Congregation, leaving little doubt as to where Mar's sympathies lay. Such a programme would not have been so readily accepted had the provost and his supporters been in the town. It may be that Menzies and his associates had not been warned about the meeting by Mar who hoped to present them with a fait accompli on their return. The only member of the council to dissent from these proceedings was Gilbert Collison,

the Master of Kirk Work.

Four days later on 8 January 1559 the burgh Head Court met. Normally the provost would have presided over this meeting, but he was still absent, although it was alleged during the meeting that he had been in the town that morning. Mar again took the initiative and attempted to press on with the programme of reform. The singers in St Nicholas' church were dismissed from their post and the preachers in the town were ordered to be paid an honest wage although unfortunately these preachers were not named.⁹⁶ It was at this Head Court that general opposition to the course that events were taking began to grow. Gilbert Menzies, the provost's son, acted as spokesman for those who had protested in December, but the opposition was no longer simply confined to the ranks of the council and some of the wealthier burgesses and craftsmen conventionally associated with them. Gilbert Menzies was joined in his protest by Simon Burnett, a prominent litster, and Robert Knowles, the brother of the bishop's concubine. It became clear that the coup was not going to succeed and, in a last desperate effort to lay hands on some of the property of the old Church, Mar ordered the commission that held the ornaments of the parish kirk to hand them over to the council at the Guild Court which was to take place four days later.⁹⁷

The matter of the vestments and altar plate of the parish kirk was pressing since three of the four commissioners entrusted with their safekeeping had now come out against any consorting with Protestantism. This raised the possibility that the Ornaments of the parish kirk might not be sold, or else that they would be used to benefit the conservative burgesses. It was sensible for Mar to order the commission to produce them at a Guild Court since as Dean of Guild he presided over the assembly. Although the provost attended the meeting, the Dean of Guild's

position was much more powerful in the matter of controlling business. At the Guild Court of 12 January the commission holding the altar plate and vestments refused to hand over their charge until all of the council should be present and agree. Clearly Mar and his followers had begun to lose the initiative, and the conservative party was re-asserting itself. The chief problem facing Thomas Menzies was how to draw the town back from the brink of rebellion without splitting the council irrevocably. The tactic he employed was to neutralise David Mar and his authority by focusing all of the debate within the council and ensuring that all, or as many as possible, of the councillors should be present.

The seriousness of the division within the burgh community is quite clear from an examination of the proceedings of the Guild Court on 12 January. Although Thomas Menzies was not the president of the court, he took the opportunity to make clear his opposition to all that had happened in the previous week. His contribution to the Guild Court gives some idea of his reasons for maintaining a low profile during these critical days. The truce agreed between the Queen Regent and the Congregation was due to expire on 10 January. Menzies simply kept out of the way until that date had passed, allowing his son to act for him.⁹⁸ The acts carried out by Mar and, as Menzies says, a minority of the town in collaboration with 'extranears' were clearly illegal after 10 January. The provost's absence from the burgh, together with his son's protests during the original attack on the town, enabled him to return to Aberdeen with his reputation untarnished as the restorer of law and order. His reaction encouraged other burgesses to express their opposition to the changes and he was able to countermand Mar's legislation and inhibit the payment of the preachers from the town's revenues. The Protestant

cause on the council suffered from having shown its hand too early and had been left isolated and deprived of general support.

Hostility to this pressure for reformation of the burgh church very quickly spread outside the ranks of the Menzies family and their supporters. Half of the council had gathered behind Menzies. They were soon joined by six others who were prepared to take instruments on their dissatisfaction at the course of events. This group consisted of three notaries who practised in the burgh, two burgesses with kinsmen amongst the chaplains of St Nicholas' and a leading craftsman, Alexander Chalmer.⁹⁹ Although this mobilisation of opinion in the town was sufficient to prevent any further steps towards the establishment of a Protestant polity, it was not strong enough to reverse the prevailing course of events. The protestant party may have been in a minority, but it was a significant minority too powerful to be ignored or overcome.

The next months were occupied with trying to retrieve what could be saved of the situation and preventing any further dismantling of the ecclesiastical property in the burgh. The conservative party, led by the provost, was torn between a desire to prevent the further entrenchment of protestantism, and the fear that any precipitate action in either direction would provoke external interference in the affairs of the town. The earl of Huntly had shown where his sympathies lay in his defence of the university and churches in Old Aberdeen,¹⁰⁰ and towards the end of January the council received a bill from him charging it to be vigilant in its protection of the religious buildings.¹⁰¹ Menzies had no enthusiasm for being caught in the middle of a struggle between the local magnates and the lords of Congregation. It was in the burgh's interest, and by implication in the Menzies' interest, to tread a wary

path between the influential Protestant party and the restless Catholic conservatism of the earl of Huntly with client families. Whilst the Menzies were not strong enough to dislodge the reformers, neither were the reformers strong enough to dislodge the Menzies. The dilemma seemed to issue in some sort of compromise mingled with delaying tactics, a skill in which the burgesses of Aberdeen were expert.

By the end of January the provost had so far re-asserted his control that the council was prevailed upon to uphold the Franciscan friary and to prevent any further damage to it.¹⁰² During the next few weeks the council occupied itself with gathering up the remaining vestments and plate resting in the hands of various chaplains and burgesses, determined that it should not simply disappear or fall into private hands. The dismantling of the remains of the religious houses was postponed and any attempts to interfere with the fabric by private individuals were discouraged by heavy penalties.¹⁰³ In many ways life went on very much as before; the chaplains continued to draw their revenues and were encouraged to do so,¹⁰⁴ and attacks on the clergy, of which there were only a few, were severely punished.¹⁰⁵ The council adopted a strictly conservationist approach until it should become clear in which direction the political wind was blowing.

It was not until the beginning of March 1560 that the first tentative steps were taken towards association with the Congregation. Again Aberdeen's position, removed as it was from the cockpit of national affairs, gave the burgesses opportunity to reflect on an appropriate response to events. Already the earl of Huntly had begun to waver in his allegiance to the Queen Regent and he had been joined by the bishop of Moray.¹⁰⁶ Clearly Aberdeen had to take account of the drift of magnatual opinion. The other leading magnate in the area, the earl Marischal,

and his associates, the Forbes, had been linked with Protestantism since the 1540s. A Catholic Aberdeen was a definite threat to aristocratic and protestant vested interests in the area, as well as presenting a useful port for re-supplying foreign forces in the country in the event of a French-inspired Catholic revival.¹⁰⁷ In fact the vigour of anti-French feeling in the country was too strong to be resisted utterly by the burgesses of Aberdeen. Therefore on 11 March the council agreed to support the Congregation by offering to send a force southwards and to raise a tax to aid the enterprise.¹⁰⁸

The co-operation offered was definitely limited, encompassing a mere forty men, a meagre figure compared with Huntly's boast of being able to muster a force of 20,000 men to support Mary Queen of Scots should she have landed at Aberdeen instead of Leith in 1561.¹⁰⁹ The decision to support the Congregation was a reversal of Menzies' previous policy which had been expressed in the strongest terms. It calls into question once more the view that the Menzies family exercised a firm control over the burgh. The treaty of Berwick of February 1560, taken together with Huntly's veering in the direction of the Congregation, may have conditioned their adherence to its cause. The terms of the treaty of Berwick were couched in a way that would have been eminently acceptable to the burgesses of Aberdeen with their scruples about rebellion. It allowed that it was possible to be anti-French without being disloyal to the Queen.¹¹⁰ Under these terms the town felt able to commit itself to the Congregation. The only objector to this measure was Gilbert Collison, the Master of the Kirk Work, who showed himself consistently opposed to any dealings with the lords.¹¹¹ When the disposition of the religious houses was discussed once more at the same meeting of 11 March, the same people who had objected to the town's trafficking with

the properties renewed their protests. However, they did not object to the alliance with the Congregation.¹¹² Some compromise was obviously emerging which allowed hope for the preservation of some form of conservative opinion alongside a modified support for the forces of change. Moreover, the English invasion of March 1560 increased the danger of a foreign attack on Aberdeen,¹¹³ which had been feared as early as January 1560 when they ordered the repair of the town's artillery.¹¹⁴ Alliance with the Congregation appeared the most prudent course of action.

The attitude of the earl of Huntly to the Congregation may also have influenced the burgesses in their decision. His hesitations throughout the beginning of the year were finally resolved in April when he rather half-heartedly subscribed to the band of the Congregation along with Leslie of Balquhain and Seton of Meldrum and other conservative lords.¹¹⁵ Whereas previously Gordon power had occasionally presented a threat to the burgh, now the town found itself an ally of magnatial interests. The difficult task facing the burgh was how to derive maximum strength and support from the alliance without being swallowed up by it. Their success in achieving an association with the right degree of distance may be partially measured in that in 1562, when Huntly's rebellion was defeated at Corrichie, the town was not dragged down in his fall.¹¹⁶

The death of Mary of Guise and the triumph of the Congregation left the burgh of Aberdeen at a loss as to how to respond. It was impossible to rely on a Catholic restoration during the Queen's absence in France, and the earl of Huntly seemed to have joined forces with the Protestants, temporarily at least. Neither could the burgh afford to abstain from the process of settlement of the realm. Two delegates

were sent to the Reformation parliament of August 1560 to pursue a limited policy of co-operation with the new regime.¹¹⁷ Their presence there gave them the invaluable opportunity of selecting the first minister of the reformed church in Aberdeen.¹¹⁸ Clearly this was a key appointment; an enthusiast, a political opportunist or a radical evangelist would have provided a centre of agitation or a focus of discontent which might polarise opinion within the burgh. The Reformation had offered the council the chance of extending their control over the burgh and they had no intention of relinquishing any more of it than was strictly necessary; they intended to control the pace and direction of reformation. In Adam Heriot they chose wisely and well; he was scholarly, retiring and not even a pale shadow of his volatile counterpart in St Giles in Edinburgh. The choice of Heriot was not simply an expedient; it was a definite option for a particular kind of church. Moreover, the local candidate for the office was passed over in Heriot's favour. From the very outset it was clear that the Reformation settlement in Aberdeen was to be different to that in other burghs.

It could not be said of Aberdeen, as it has been of Edinburgh, that the core of the new burgh church was composed of the enthusiasts of the 1550s or before. Protestantism has left very little traces on the burgh records before 1560. The composition of Protestant congregations before the Reformation is largely unknown, but some fragments of information may be pieced together. In 1544, during the aftermath of the brief Protestant outreach in Aberdeen, two of the burgesses had been convicted of desecrating a statue of St Francis. The initiative in the prosecution had been taken by the earl of Huntly.¹¹⁹ In late 1558 or early 1559 an attack had been made on the kirk at Echt, but this may have been part of the continuing quarrel between the Gordons and

the Forbes, since Echt was in the middle of Forbes territory. In 1559 the canons of the diocese had made the surprising allegation that some of the best known heretics in the district were known personally to the bishop and may even have been part of his social or family circle.¹²⁰ Although the events of 1559-1560 suggest that Protestant opinion was represented in the burgh, it is not clear how deep it was or if it was related in any way to the events described above.

On the whole Aberdeen did not seek out and punish Protestants; there were no burnings and inquisitions; even the two burgesses who mutilated the statue of St Francis were not harshly punished. The only ordinance of the council that suggests there may have been some misgivings about Catholic doctrine or practice is that relating to St Nicholas bread which was re-affirmed from time to time.¹²¹ It provided that the burgesses should take it in turns to supply the bread for the eucharist in the parish kirk. In 1544 the first refusal of a burgess to fulfil this duty is recorded in the council register; the burgess in question was David Mar.¹²² Altogether five burgesses disobeyed the statute between 1544 and 1557,¹²³ and of these five, four appear on the first kirk session of 1562, two as elders and two as deacons.¹²⁴ Their previous association with dissent did not give them any undue influence or pride of place in the session. The most notable Protestant figure in Aberdeen before 1560 was Thomas Branche. He had been one of the two burgesses prosecuted for the desecration of the statue of St Francis in 1544.¹²⁵ A year later he was fined for refusing to pay for the communion bread for the parish kirk.¹²⁶ In July 1559 he committed himself to the support of the Congregation at St Andrews and was present for the establishment of godly discipline there.¹²⁷ Despite this Protestant lineage he still served only as a deacon on the

kirk session in 1562.¹²⁸ It was by no means clear in 1560 that the active Protestants in the burgh were going to rule the burgh church.

Another signpost to the existence of a privy kirk in Aberdeen is the award to John Brabaner in October 1560 of a suit of black clothes 'For his labours, cuir and diligence in time bygane in preching, teching and administratioun of the sacraments without any recompension'.¹²⁹ Brabaner had been exercising some form of ministry in Aberdeen for some time therefore. His name also appears with Branche's amongst those who signed the band of the Congregation at St Andrews in 1559.¹³⁰ The mention of Brabaner in October of 1560 is his only appearance in the records of the burgh, although there are many references to a family of Brabaners in the burgh. Some trace of his opinions within the ecclesiastical spectrum may be gained from other sources in which he is described as labouring in Angus and the Mearns in the company of Paul Methven, later minister of Jedburgh.¹³¹ Whilst in the south, Brabaner had taught in the household of Robert Maule of Panmure. In the Register of Panmure he is described as one of the 'chiefest ministers' in the country.¹³² The Aberdeen congregation was not without some pastoral care although Brabaner's efforts had not been financially rewarded. When the town did acknowledge its debt to him he received a suit of clothes and was not promoted to be parish minister. The conservative burgesses were by no means anxious to submit to the ministrations of a man of the same opinions as Paul Methven, Willock, Harlaw and Knox.

Brabaner's supplanter, Adam Heriot, was amongst the great crowd of ministers at Edinburgh in August 1560. Heriot had the advantage of service in the Catholic Church, as a canon of St Andrews, behind him which may have made him slightly more acceptable to the conservatives in Aberdeen. In the days of Mary of Guise he had been a judicious and prudent

exponent of the new doctrines. On one occasion when preaching before the Queen Regent, he had moderated the expression of his thought on the real presence lest he offend her. Heriot, it seemed, was not immune to pressure. His ministry in Aberdeen was far from controversial and Spottiswood's description of him as 'greatly beloved of the citizens for his humane and courteous conversation' suggests that he was not aggressive in his Protestantism.¹³³ The General Assembly also had doubts about his enthusiasm and effectiveness, and on a number of occasions asked him to take order with the survival of Catholicism in the area, but his efforts met with little success. He seemed to be the ideal candidate for the ministry in Aberdeen; he was learned, quiet and a scholastic theologian of some competence inclined to moderation in doctrine.

Although Heriot arrived in Aberdeen in the latter half of 1560, it was to be another two years before the framework of godly discipline could be established. Even then this was not in response to Heriot's dynamism, but was rather connected with the current political situation in the north-east. The battle of Corrichie in October 1562 left Aberdeen in a particularly exposed position. Gordon power was utterly crushed and the authority of the earl of Moray, who had long intended to confront the conservatism of Aberdeen, was in the ascendant.¹³⁴ The establishment of the session and the system of regular church discipline was a direct response to Huntly's defeat and the presence of the earl of Moray in the town.

Although forced to establish the session, the council was determined to prevent the kirk from becoming a focus for opposition to the ruling elite that governed the burgh, an eventuality that was to occur with the agitation leading to the Common Indenture of 1587.¹³⁵ The dominant element on the session of 1562 was not the members of the privy

kirk of the 1550s. Of the twenty-one members of the session only four may be shown as having something of a Protestant pedigree before 1560. The membership of the session was not determined by open election. The preamble to the proceedings of the session in November shows that its members were first selected in secret and then presented to the congregation by the minister for their acclamation.¹³⁶ Although this was a procedure allowed for in the First Book of Discipline it was hardly in accord with its spirit;¹³⁷ there was to be no direct democracy, in fact no democratic element at all. The session was chosen behind closed doors by the same oligarchy that composed the ruling group on the council. It merely emerged when its composition had been agreed by the various groupings that formed the council. The list of members in November 1562 confirms this hypothesis.

The dominant figure on the session was the provost who attended its deliberations ex officio. His influence was extended through the members of his family who also sat on the session. Of the twenty-two members of the session, twelve were also councillors. Eleven of the elders sat on the council. The remaining three elders together with the seven deacons represented the crafts and the minor merchants. The dominant element in the session was therefore essentially the same caucus that ran the town council. In many ways the session was the mirror image of the council with the same pressure groups, the same factions, and the same patterns of patronage and kinship. It was to take almost a decade for it to become strong enough to present any kind of challenge to the establishment, and even then that challenge was indirect and undertaken at the prompting from the Regent Morton.¹³⁷

The composition of the session was intended to neutralise any threat to the conservatism of the council. The burgess oligarchy hoped

to avoid any danger of religious controversy by confining discussion within its own ranks. The single forum for theological exchange was to be the parish kirk. Amongst the statutes devised for governing the new kirk in Aberdeen in December of 1562 there was included an inhibition on any 'disputatioun nor ressonyng of the scriptures be at denar or supper or oppin table, quhairthrow arrysis gryte contentioun and debate'.¹³⁸ The concern of the burgesses was not simply to maintain the integrity and tranquillity of Christian domestic life, but to prevent any manifestation of what we might call 'protestant banqueting'. The session, and behind them we may detect the hand of the council, did not wish to see the continuance of any privy kirks. There were to be no private conventicles in burgesses' houses, no cells of zealots existing as a challenge to the official expression of burgh religion. The advantages of one minister and one kirk governed by an experienced council was that controversy could be prevented and debate controlled with threats to the establishment eliminated.

Any possible threat from the minister's independent action was also countered in the statutes of December 1562. It was ordained 'that the prechour publeish nor speak of na speciall mater, to the rebuking of ony notable or particular persoune, without the consent and avisament of the Assemblie had thairto, and gif he do he sall onderly the correctioun of the Assemblie!'.¹³⁹ Heriot was by no means a radical character, but the session was taking no chances; his activity was to be limited in no uncertain terms. The oligarchy viewed the kirk in Aberdeen as a civic institution and not a dynamic evangelical organism. This may account for its somewhat slow progress in winning widespread support, a tardiness that was a constant source of anxiety to successive General Assemblies.¹⁴⁰

The problem faced by Heriot and his fellow Protestants was considerable. The ecclesiastical settlement in Aberdeen had come about through a combination of external pressure and national politics with local minority opinion; it was not the result of a steady growth of Protestant opinion within the burgh. The small Protestant party in the town would not have been strong enough to bring about reformation on its own. It was constantly dependent on outside encouragement. It was an alien movement facing a conservative burgh elite which was experienced in government and the manipulation of burgh institutions. The minister, who should have been one of the leading exponents of reformed doctrine, was an outsider facing a web of kinship, wealth, patronage and compromise. A more dynamic character might have found it easier. Heriot faced the additional difficulty of the survival of much of the structure and personnel of the old Church inside the town. The staff of the parish kirk were still a notable feature of burgh society, and even kirk itself was not fully adapted to the Protestant form of service until 1574.¹⁴¹ Both the town council and the kirk session maintained Catholics in their ranks and many of the other members of both bodies had Catholics in their families. The situation was untidy and unsatisfactory to say the least and was to remain so for almost a decade.

The establishment of Protestantism as the 'official' church of the burgh did not involve the disappearance or proscription of Catholicism. Catholicism survived not simply in the persons of its clergy, who were not forced to leave the burgh, but even in its theological and liturgical expression. After the Reformation the Catholic Church went underground, the public kirk became the privy kirk. It was still possible to attend mass and receive the sacrament.¹⁴² It was even possible to attend a Catholic university until 1569, with King's College in Old Aber-

deen, and it was from there that the main opposition to Protestantism issued in the debates of 1561.¹⁴³ Alongside the established Protestant church there was an unofficial, covert 'privy kirk' which was Catholic in confession, and which continued to minister to the needs of the people until the end of the century if not longer. The paradoxical aspect of the situation is that some of the inhabitants of the burgh, from the highest to the lowest, managed to combine membership of both with little apparent sense of contradiction. There was thus a dual ecclesiastical establishment whose membership overlapped. This was true of its laity, and even more surprisingly of its clergy, as with John Collison who, having refused to support the ministers of the kirk for many years, agreed to lead the psalm singing in the parish kirk on Sundays.¹⁴⁴

A sign of the equivocal attitude of the burgesses of Aberdeen to the Reformation may be seen in its policy towards the former clergy of the Catholic Church. As we have seen, there existed considerable ties of blood and patronage between the various churches and religious houses of the burgh and its inhabitants. Nonconformity amongst the chaplains of St Nicholas was hardly likely to be severely punished since most of them were relations of members of the town council. In resolving this problem the town council adopted a gentle approach; its attitude was publicly correct whilst being privately considerate. The council did impose a religious test on the chaplains in accordance with the decision of the convention of nobility in January 1561.¹⁴⁵ This test and its reception by the clergy reveals that there was some resistance to the acceptance of the Reformation. The vacancies on the chapter of the collegiate church of St Nicholas had been filled by the beginning of 1560.¹⁴⁶ Yet, in the documents signed by the chaplains in the years

after that time the full total of sixteen names never appears.¹⁴⁷

Some of the chaplains accepted the condition of attendance at the preaching and prayers led by Adam Heriot, but they were not forced to receive communion, which enabled them to enjoy some relief for their consciences.

Other chaplains refused to conform in any way. The most significant amongst these was John Black, the master of the Sang School. In 1561 the council ordered that he be paid his yearly pension provided that he continued to teach in the school and bring the pupils to the services in the parish kirk.¹⁴⁸ A few months later he is found asking for a licence to leave the country for the purpose of study. The council agreed to this request but, with its usual economic sensitivity, stipulated that he should not receive his pension during his period abroad.¹⁴⁹

In October of the same year he made another appeal for his pension and the council replied on the same terms as before.¹⁵⁰ Evidently Black continued to feel unable to bring the boys of the school to sing at the reformed services. In 1562 the problem still had not been solved but Black offered to reach some kind of compromise with the council by teaching in the school whilst being excused from bringing the boys to the kirk. The council continued to regard this as a breach of his contract and were not prepared to reach such an accommodation with him.¹⁵¹

During all of this time there seems to have been no instruction in the school and Aberdeen's fine musical tradition lapsed. In 1565 the saga continued with Black making another appeal for his salary and being refused unless he should conform by coming to the kirk with his pupils.¹⁵²

The problem was not resolved until 1574 when Black agreed to teach and to show some kind of acceptance of the Protestant settlement. His decision may have been affected by his own changed circumstances. By 1571 he had married and may have come to the conclusion that any hope

of a Catholic restoration was ended.¹⁵³ However, during his period of opposition he remained in the town unmolested, and was even able to travel abroad on trading voyages and support himself as a merchant in partnership with his brother who lived in Fuddy.¹⁵⁴ His last, sad contact with his former way of life was in 1574 when he dismantled the organs in St Nicholas' kirk and packed them away so that they might be sold in accordance with the Regent Morton's instructions.¹⁵⁵

Black was not the only one of the chaplains to experience some difficulties with the new regime. His colleague, Andrew Leslie, also held out for some time before he eventually capitulated in order to enjoy an ecclesiastical career in Old Aberdeen.¹⁵⁶ Master Andrew Gray, who had been appointed in 1556, sought refuge on the continent after 1560, hoping to preserve his income and avoid compromising himself by submission to the Reformation.¹⁵⁷ He constituted his brother, Patrick Gray, as his procurator for collecting the revenues due to him from his altar and presumably they were sent to him on one of the ships that plied across the North Sea between Flanders and Scotland. Andrew Gray had been suggested as a chaplain by John Black and it is perhaps significant that he should have shared his hesitations about the Reformation.¹⁵⁸

Other chaplains were not young enough or fit enough to leave the country to find peace abroad. Two of them, John Goldsmith and Robert Spark, had served the burgh church for many years and found it difficult to accustom themselves to the new way of things. The council was unwilling to see them suffer complete deprivation and ordered that their pensions be paid to them in token of their years of good service.¹⁵⁹ Provided that it was discreet, and did not express itself militantly, dissent was tolerated. The attitude of the council was lenient, and even generous, to members of the former Catholic clergy both religious

and secular.

A number of the former religious, too, continued active opposition to the Reformation in the years after 1560. The guardian of the Grey friars and a number of his brethern are alleged to have left Aberdeen to live out the rest of their lives in the houses of their order on the continent.¹⁶⁰ Since the guardian, John Roger, is found amongst the Catholic preachers of Mary Queen of Scots in 1565 his exile cannot have lasted very long.¹⁶¹ Similarly with the prior of the Black friars, who continued his work for the Catholic cause, as did some of his colleagues, including Father John Black who had been procurator of the Aberdeen priory.¹⁶² There was also a group of friars who remained in Aberdeen after 1560 and who lived a quieter life than some of their bretheren. This group depended on the tolerance and support of the council. Two of the former Grey friars were offered the post of caretakers of their former friary and were paid by the council in that capacity.¹⁶³ The prior of the Carmelites, John Failford, was given shelter in the house of the provost until his death in 1576.¹⁶⁴ He was in touch with the continent during all of this time and was receiving books from there as late as 1572.¹⁶⁵ In January 1568 the council ordered that Richard Garden, a Carmelite should receive his board and lodging from the chief men of the town until further notice.¹⁶⁶ Garden was able to come and go at the tables of the burgesses without any suspicion being raised. It was unusual for a Catholic priest to have access to the chief men of the town with the blessing of the council, thereby providing him with the opportunity for that kind of 'ressonyng' about the scriptures that was so suspected by the kirk session.

A further example of the council using its powers of patronage to support Catholic priests in circumstances that could be seen as favourable to the continuation of their ministry is evident in the case

of John Wright. Wright was a chaplain of St Nicholas who does not seem to have conformed to the Reformation settlement.¹⁶⁷ In 1566 he was appointed keeper of the lighthouse that had recently been established in St Ninian's chapel at the top of the Castlehill.¹⁶⁸ He was therefore available to the inhabitants of the burgh yet sufficiently apart to be unobtrusive. Against this gamut of Catholic clergy in the burgh Protestantism could muster only Adam Heriot and John Lesley, the reader.¹⁶⁹ On the whole a fairly small number of the Aberdeen clergy conformed and served as ministers of the new church. Some estimates have placed the figure at eight vicars who remained in office after the Reformation. Others have proposed the addition of two curates and one member of the cathedral chapter, Mr George Hay, who served as commissioner for Aberdeenshire.¹⁷⁰ At least one of the chaplains must be added to this list, Alexander Robertson, who served as minister of Maryculter from 1562. Robertson maintained a house in Aberdeen, so he may have spent at least some of his time there.¹⁷¹ Alexander Ramsay had served at some time as chaplain of Our Lady of Piety in St Nicholas' and later on he was to become reader at Aberdour.¹⁷² Most of the clergy refused to serve as ministers or readers although some, like John Collison, compromised later on.¹⁷³

The proponents of the Reformation were also forced to confront another reality of life in Aberdeen: the extraordinary network of kinship and family ties. Even those who supported the Protestant cause were connected by blood or marriage to Catholic sympathisers. In the manuscript of the kirk session register a significant emendation has been made to one of the statutes formulated in December of 1562 concerning the treatment of those who refuse to accept the new doctrines. In its original form penalties were laid on those

who associated with excommunicates. However, in the manuscript, ^{this passage} has been deleted. Plainly it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to enforce these penalties because non-conformity was so pervasive,¹⁷⁴ and placed such strains on kinship ties. A glance at the families of the members of the kirk session shows that Catholicism was present even in their ranks. The wife of the scribe to the session, Bessie Seinyer was a convinced Catholic and the daughter of one of Edinburgh's leading Marian merchants.¹⁷⁵ The provost kept his own private chaplain, John Failford, to minister to his needs. Alexander Knowles was on friendly terms with the bishop of Aberdeen, and his daughter, Janet was on even closer terms having borne the bishop several children.¹⁷⁶ The wife of Master George Middleton, one of the bailies, remained a Catholic until 1574 when she conformed under pressure.¹⁷⁷ Of the four members of the Menzies family on the session, three were periodically accused of papistry whilst the wife of Gilbert Menzies the elder, the provost's brother, refused to conform even during the crack down on the new kirk in 1574.¹⁷⁸ A pattern of determined and fairly healthy Catholicism emerges, therefore, whose influence stretched right to the heart of the new kirk in the burgh. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that Master George Hay should have wished to surrender his post as superintendent having been defeated by the complexity of the situation.¹⁷⁹

The session does not seem to have been used as an instrument of religious repression. Its avowed aim was that those who did not come to the kirk should be 'handillit and travellit with gentilly'.¹⁸⁰ There are no records of any prosecution of non-attenders until 1574, and even then the cases were quite specific and directed against the leading conservatives in the burgh and not outside that group.¹⁸¹ The

session chiefly concerned itself with supervising the moral behaviour of the citizens. Most of the business that came before it related to fornication or to adultery, and most of those who were prosecuted were craftsmen or women. There was one embarrassing exception in 1574 when the minister's sister was punished for procuring.¹⁸² Since the session was so strongly packed with crypto-Catholics it is easy to see why prosecutions for non-conformity should have been rare. The Protestant grouping on the session was not strong enough to enforce a firmer policy and would not be so for at least another decade.

Since a considerable amount of Catholic sentiment survived, it is perhaps not surprising that certain pious Catholic practices should also have remained. The recurrence of public demonstrations of traditional celebrations are associated principally with the craftsmen. The seasons and ceremonies of the Catholic Church had been of special significance to them, since they allowed for the public expression of corporate identity together with a demonstration of the rank and importance of the craft. The religious aspirations of the craft were focussed on the altar in St Nicholas' and its place in burgh society was seen in the precedence accorded to it in public liturgical processions. There was considerable friction at successive Corpus Christi processions in the 1550s because certain crafts had usurped the place of others in the order of the procession.¹⁸³ The place of honour was that nearest the Blessed Sacrament, and it was a matter of competition to see which craft could secure that place. On such occasions the whole hierarchy of the ordered burgh commonwealth could be seen, religious and secular, clerical and lay, burgess and craftsmen, all joined together in a dramatic presentation of the inherent order of burgh life. Needless to say the Reformation called all of these assumptions into question, and in changing the

expression of these principles it came very close to changing the foundations on which they rested. The burgesses of Aberdeen were not unaware of the subversive power of the new kirk, which is one of the reasons they set out to control it.

The Reformation proved to be a shock to the craft guilds, striking at the root of their distinctive identity and traditions. The frustration of the public expression of their religious character drove them to find other ways of promoting a corporate sense of identity and expressing it in distinction to the council. This inevitably brought them into conflict with the burgess oligarchy. The liturgical celebrations of Corpus Christi may no longer have been possible, but in 1562 there were attempts to continue the traditional marking of the seasons of the year. In May the town's bellman was punished for drawing people out into the fields to celebrate the coming of May.¹⁸⁴ Three years later in 1565 certain craftsmen were again brought before the council and charged with an attempt to restore the ancient custom of Robin Hood and Little John which had been suppressed by parliament in 1555. The ringleaders of this escapade were later to become prominent as leaders of the agitation leading to the Decreet Arbitral of 1587.¹⁸⁵

More was swept away in 1560 than liturgical celebrations and the public expression of the nature of burgh society. The large number of religious holidays in earlier times had ensured freedom from work for craftsmen and servants, but such opportunities were drastically reduced after 1560. It was not even clear that servants would be permitted to attend Sunday services in the kirk on a regular basis. The session merely stipulated that it was desirable for servants to attend the preaching every other Sunday.¹⁸⁶ Indeed the observance of Catholic holidays seems to have been one of the most difficult traces of the pre-Reformation Church

to erradicate. It survived very strongly amongst the craftsmen and was one of the principal targets of the Regent Morton in 1574 during his attempts to plant Protestantism in the conservative soil of Aberdeen.

On numerous occasions the craftsmen were rebuked for taking Catholic holidays. In January 1576 the craft deacons were admonished for not preventing their crafts from sitting idle on Christmas day.¹⁸⁷ The custom seems to have been so deeply ingrained that it was necessary to warn the masters of the grammar and sang schools to enforce attendance on feast days. Despite this injunction, parents were still keeping their children at home. The council therefore ordered that the names of non-attenders should be reported to them.¹⁸⁸ A few years earlier the council had actually encouraged the keeping of such holidays by permitting the pupils at the grammar school to remain absent from December 21 to the feast of the Epiphany.¹⁸⁹ Despite the council's apparent change of heart, public celebrations, especially at Christmas time, proved difficult to stamp out. In December 1574 a sizeable group of people, mostly women, were charged with dancing and singing 'off fylthe carrolles' on Christmas day.¹⁹⁰ While Catholic doctrine may not have been widely preached, traditional Catholic practices, so firmly entwined with local custom and social life, proved difficult to uproot. Catholic sympathies are found present throughout every stratum of burgh society, protected by a powerful group of conservative burgesses at the heart of the patriciate forming the oligarchy that ruled the burgh. Any attempt to root out Catholicism would therefore involve an inevitable conflict with vested interest, and the odds were against immediate success.

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CHAPTER FIVE

The Queen's Northern Province.

The initial impact of the Reformation in Aberdeen was in terms of a problem of order rather than religion. The religious changes stemming from the successes of the lords of Congregation promoted crises of community rather than of conscience. Aberdeen had reacted very cautiously to the clarion call of evangelical reform in the early months of 1560. The principal concern of the burgess oligarchy had been how to maintain the traditional patterns of authority in the face of the volatile uncertainties of religious conflict. Their reaction to events had been conditioned by a desire not to 'interpryss ony purpos against the authorite'.¹ The authority they spoke of encompassed not only the legitimate government of Mary of Guise but the foundations of customary authority on which their own power rested. This 'authorite' was the principle of regulation and legitimacy which bound the various component parts of the community of the realm together: the community of the region, the community of the burgh and the community of the Kirk. The religious changes of 1560 questioned the accepted certainties on which the fabric of social and political relationships rested and radically challenged the boundaries which marked these communities as distinct. Moreover, this decisive shift in religious and political expression undermined the religious language which had hitherto articulated corporate self-understanding.

Scottish society is often regarded as having been highly personalised in character, nationally as well as locally.² The corporate personality of each community rested on an individual or group of individuals who embodied the interests and traditions of their constituency. The credibility and respect they were able to command rested on a static interpretation of the exercise of authority and placed great stress on legitimacy and heritage. It is not surprising therefore that such representative figures should have clung to their conservatism and been

reluctant to commit themselves to the uncertain new world of the reformers. In the absence of the supreme representative figure, the sovereign, the various communities of the realm strove to overcome their sense of vulnerability and to maintain their integrity and privileges. This process involved the formation of a number of unusual coalitions between the various representative figures in the localities. In the case of the north-east the fates of Catholicism and Protestantism were to turn on the mutual relations of the queen, the earl of Huntly and the burghess aristocracy of Aberdeen. The key note of oligarchical policy in Aberdeen was the preservation of its independence from the colonialist ambitions of the earl of Huntly, whilst maintaining its direct link with the central government. The precarious conservative balance achieved by the burgh in avoiding being crushed by the twin forces of magnatial and royal politics was almost ruined by the radicalism of the crown in the shape of Queen Mary's direct intervention in the locality which cut across traditional loyalties.

The policy within the burgh of Aberdeen was to implement cautiously the bare necessities of the Reformation programme. Although a minister was appointed, and he was assisted by a reader by 1563,³ there was no kirk session established until 1562. In October 1560 a resolution was passed in the Guidry court of the burgh binding the council to assist the provost in 'menteyning' Christ's religion. Another measure designed to secure the conformity of the chaplains of the parish kirk to the new Protestant rules was also approved by the court. Their rents were to be paid to them provided that they attended the prayers and preaching in St Nicholas's kirk.⁴ However, no confessions of faith were required beyond attendance at the kirk. David Marr, the Dean of Guild, presided over the Guildry court and moves towards the establishment of Protestan-

tism within the burgh usually stemmed from there. Neither did the burghesses see the necessity of removing their Master of the Grammar School from office despite his conservative sympathies. Indeed, in March 1561 they increased his salary.⁵ In terms of external policy the representatives of the burgh did not hesitate to co-operate with the initiatives of the lords of Congregation. The burgh agreed to send representatives on July 1560 and Thomas Menzies, the provost, David Marr, the Dean of Guild and Master Duncan Forbes, the first a conservative and the latter two with Protestant sympathies, were chosen to speak for the burgh in Edinburgh.⁶ Similarly in December 1560 the council agreed that Thomas Menzies and David Marr should go to Edinburgh for a meeting of the lords in January 1561 'to consult about all things thocht expedient for the realm and obedience to the Queen's majesty'.⁷

The convention of January 1561 was concerned with ensuring that the queen would not pursue a policy that would undermine the position they had so laboriously achieved. They also considered and gave qualified approval to the First Book of Discipline. The convention was thinly attended, some of those entitled to attend judging it more prudent to remain aloof from a further confirmation of the religious settlement until the queen's opinions were clearer. Some members of the Protestant party must have judged it time to fire another warning shot in the direction of the conservative camp by summoning the leading members of King's College in Aberdeen to debate various theological issues with the General Assembly. The Aberdeen doctors were held temporarily in custody and then released.⁸ The Protestant party in the country was not quite ready, or strong enough, to alienate the earl of Huntly, the chief conservative spokesman, but they had made their intentions clear. An attack on the ecclesiastical establishment of Old Aberdeen could not fail to touch Huntly personally.

His uncle was the bishop, and those summoned before the assembly in January formed part of the bishop's circle of advisers. The earl had declared his interest in defending Old Aberdeen as well as staking a claim to it as a Gordon stronghold by taking over three of the canons' houses in the Chanonry to make a town residence for himself.⁹ Moreover, at the entry to the Chanonry stood the substantial dwelling of the Gordons of Cluny, a powerful cadet family of the house of Huntly.¹⁰ The burgesses of Aberdeen, by the presence of their representatives at this convention, laid themselves open to the disapproval of the Gordons. However, Menzies' prudence may have prompted Marr to withhold their signature from the document which approved the Book of Discipline on 27 January 1561.¹¹

The decision of the convention to send Lord James to Queen Mary in France so that she and they might prepare for her return prompted the earl of Huntly, as the spokesman for the conservative party, to send a rival embassy to offer his counsel. He chose John Leslie, who had been a member of the party of Aberdeen clergy summoned to answer for their Catholic doctrine at the January Convention.¹² Later on in his History Leslie reported that he asked Mary to land in Aberdeen and join forces with Huntly so that the whole country could be reduced to obedience through their combined efforts.¹³ Mary declined this offer and determined that she would instead follow the advice of Lord James in seeking closer ties with England and the succession to Elizabeth.

The burgesses of Aberdeen meanwhile gave no indication that they shared the earl of Huntly's hopes for a Catholic restoration. The provost certainly seemed to follow the opposite course, advocating closer ties with England and being a supporter of the proposed marriage between the earl of Arran and Queen Elizabeth. In pursuing this policy he was reviving a long-standing association between the Menzies and the Hamiltons

and incidentally distancing himself further from the interests of the earl of Huntly.¹⁴ In any event the Aberdeen council was not deflected from its association with the Congregation and was represented once more at the Convention of May 1561 by the provost. The same convention declined to renew the alliance with France, implicitly declaring itself to be in favour of approaches to England. Moreover it received a supplication from certain members of the Reformed party that further measures be taken against Catholic sympathisers and that idolatry be suppressed generally.¹⁵ One of the signatories of the document was the provost of Aberdeen who appears in company with the Master of Lindsay, the laird of Ferniehurst and George Lovell a burgess of Dundee, of whom the former two at least had been constant in their loyalty to Protestantism. It was clear that one way of securing peace in the burgh of Aberdeen was by an apparent acceptance of the Reformation when such acceptance was required at the meeting of the Estates, but practical politics at home in the burgh need not be affected. Judicious temporising and prudential acceptance of the existing state of affairs in the hope of the coming of better days was the foundation of burgh policy in the first years of the Reformation. However, the attitude of the burgesses of Aberdeen, in the long term, was bound to be influenced by the policies of the earl of Huntly who cast a long shadow in the north-east.

By 1560 the earldom of Huntly was one of the few great territorial lordships of Scotland. The Gordons had quickly established themselves in the north-east where the Stewarts and the Douglasses had held sway before them.¹⁶ Their rise was due to royal favour and an astute policy of prudent marriage and local alliance building. The territorial possessions of the family increased in scope throughout the fifteenth century and contributed to the considerable family fortunes. The original Gordon

lands in Berwickshire were soon overshadowed by the large holdings in the north-east; originating as a Borders family the Gordons had to set about implanting themselves in north-eastern society in order to fulfil their function and the royal will. Their success is measured in that the first earl was granted the lordship of Badenoch and Enzie and his successors increased the patrimony adding Schives, Netherdale, Boyne, Strathavob and Brae Lochaber. This increase in landed endowment offered the earls unrivalled opportunities for patronage and the creation of a gentry clientage. They made good use of these opportunities settling cadet branches of the family on the lands in return for the traditional services due to kin and lord.¹⁷ By the time the fourth earl succeeded the landed expansion of the Gordons had largely ceased and his interest extended towards the expansion of his 'affinity' by entering into bonds of manrent with the local noble and gentry families and the acquisition of honours and titles which demonstrated the power and prestige of his lordship.

By the mid-sixteenth century a pattern of considerable stability and continuity had been laid. The Gordon earls enjoyed the benefits of long life and their succession was not interrupted by female succession or forfeiture, the principal threats to the fortunes of a great house.¹⁸ The fourth earl's family had held the lands for a long time and had benefitted from a consistent pattern of increase within the same area; such influence could not be dismantled overnight and could survive many serious blows to its effectiveness. Successive generations had consolidated the 'indigenisation' of the family by marrying their sons and daughters into the families of the local lairds, thereby increasing the durability of the new regional power structure substantially.¹⁹

The real architect of the Gordon fortunes in the north-east had

been the third earl. In 1504-5 he had co-operated with the king in destroying the Lordship of the Isles. As a direct consequence the king rewarded him in 1506 with various lands and baronies which added to his already strong holdings in the north.²⁰ The king recognised Huntly's potential as bastion and defender of the royal interests in the north by extending his jurisdiction and appointing him sheriff and keeper of the castle of Inverness and giving him power to appoint deputies throughout the counties of Inverness, Ross and Caithness. The Gordon hegemony in the north-east was of quite recent vintage and was a direct result of royal favour and encouragement.

The continuance of royal favour depended on loyal and effective administration of the region. The fourth earl recognised this as an implicit condition of tenure and, having his majority some years after succeeding his grandfather the third earl, set about forming a series of alliances sealing them with bonds of manrent. Between 1536 and 1541, in the first years of his administration therefore, the earl signed eight bonds of manrent with northern families like the Leslie of Balquhain and the Gordons of Strathavon, together with the northern clansmen such as the Macleans of Duart and the Mackintoshes, taking advantage of the temporary eclipse of the earl of Argyll's power in the area to bind them to him. The bonds of manrent offered a double benefit to the earl, weaving him more tightly into the web of local landed society, creating an affinity and following, and at the same time making his function as guardian of the north easier to fulfill. There were a further twenty bonds signed between 1543 and 1560 including bands with Lord Lovat, the earl of Argyll himself, the earl of Crawford, the captain of Clan Cameron, Forbes of Corsindae, Grant of Freuchy and Meldrum of Fyvie.²¹ The earl's tendrils of power even stretching into the burgh of Aberdeen itself to embrace

Master Duncan Forbes of Monymusk, a regular opponent of the Menzies family, and a man with pronounced Protestant sympathies.²²

The Gordons were thus rapidly establishing patterns of power and patronage throughout the sixteenth century, all the time operating within the traditions of good lordship. Since in many ways they were of recent pedigree in the north-east, their aspirations to prove themselves of ancient and honourable lineage, expressed in a desire for offices and titles, as well as an increase in the circle of clientage, were all the stronger.²³ It was in the earl's interest to assert that his family interest was part of the customary order handed down from the past. In this regard his endeavours to prove his good lordship were of considerable intensity stretching even to providing for the spiritual welfare of his tenants and dependants. He manifested his concern and personal piety as well as his wealth by beginning a project to establish a collegiate church on his lands.²⁴ On a number of occasions during the sixteenth century the earl was called upon to fulfil the terms of his implicit contract with the crown by curbing the men of the north and the isles. He failed in his trust only on one occasion and it was precisely then that the queen regent imprisoned him and declared him forfeit, albeit temporarily.²⁵ It is a tribute to his own loyalty and his acceptance of the terms of the relationship that he did not contest her action but accepted it.

Inevitably one of the strands of significance running through the Gordon quest for land and titles and their concern for constructing a complex of personal relations with the lesser families of the north-east is the contemporary understanding of honour.²⁶ In Gavin Douglas's Palice of Honour, honour holds court in a chamber amongst his special intimates, the princes clad in golden armour set with precious stones.²⁷ The assumption underlying this image is that ancient lineage and noble blood were

inextricably linked with honourable behaviour. The third and fourth earls owed their positions in northern society to their special relationships with the sovereign. The function of nobility in terms of government and display was their particular concern, binding them into a corporate code of behaviour as well as the exercise of the royal commission. Their position of honour rested not simply on royal favour but also on its acceptance by lesser contemporaries.

The earl of Huntly's understanding of his role and power are clearly reflected in the accounts of the state he kept at Strathbogie. When Mary of Guise visited the earl in 1555 it was alleged that his princely style and lavish way of life aroused the disquiet of some of Mary's French advisors who proposed that the earl's power be bridled. When Randolph accompanied Mary Queen of Scots and Moray to the north in 1562 he was able to describe the splendours of Strathbogie which was accepted as the finest house in the country.²⁸ The existence of the fine house was indispensable for any magnate who wished to maintain any significant regional connexion; he had to enjoy a place which could act as the centre of the country and be the location of his household.²⁹ By the time of the Reformation Strathbogie had become, like many English castles, less a place of defence and more a showcase for the power and prestige of its lord. Its lack of defensive credibility is seen in the ease with which it was taken after Corrichie.³⁰ The conspicuous consumption of the Gordon court at Strathbogie and its lavish display was not the arrogant expression of the independence of an overmighty subject, but the proper fulfilment of the responsibilities of one of the natural counsellors of the king and one of the chief pillars of his government.

Huntly's own enthusiasm for the religious and political changes of 1560 was as lukewarm as that of the Aberdeen council. He had remained

loyal to the Queen Regent until April 1560 when he half-heartedly subscribed the band of the Congregation along with Leslie of Balquhain, Seton the younger of Meldrum and other conservative lords.³¹ The earl's commitment to the Protestant cause was always suspect. He and his uncle, the bishop of Aberdeen, maintained a diplomatic absence from the Reformation parliament. In June he had stressed the strength of feeling in the north-east against the Reformation and implied that this was preventing his firm adherence to the Protestant forces.³² Since he also claimed that he was suffering from a sickness, it seems more than likely that he was temporising. Knox believed him to be a 'bye lyer' and totally untrustworthy.³³ The death of Mary of Guise in June 1560 served only to intensify his non-committal attitude. Neither the earl of Huntly nor the burgess aristocracy of Aberdeen showed any conviction that the settlement of 1560 was permanent. Huntly's conservatism was a clear cause for concern to the Lord James and the Protestant earl of Argyll. In September 1560 they, together with the Catholic earl of Atholl who was feuding with the Gordons, held a conference on what to do about Huntly's potential opposition.³⁴ There emerged from this meeting a league between them 'to bridle' the earl who was seen to be the principal threat to the Protestant victory.³⁵ Huntly had always been suspicious of anglophile policies and was likely, in the event of the Queen's return, to be involved in any conservative reaction backed by France than in any firm support for Protestantism. His power in the north was considerable and his control of the coastline allowed the possibility of sea-borne troops being assured of a welcome there from the Gordons and their client families. It was in the interests of the burgesses of Aberdeen to distance themselves from any conflict between the earl and those who held power in Edinburgh, since too close an association with him threatened their indivi-

dual liberties and their dominance of burgh life. The difficult path they chose to follow was limited co-operation with the Congregation whilst striving to avoid alienating the earl of Huntly.

Given Huntly's covert disapproval of the recent turn of events it is perhaps surprising that Aberdeen should not only be represented at the parliament in August 1560, but also that the burgh should accept the nomination of its first minister from there. The lack of leadership and the poor showing of the conservative faction at the parliament may partly account for the acceptance of Adam Heriot as minister. He was a former canon of St Andrews who had served as minister there as early as October 1559,³⁶ and formed part of a group of former canons who were placed as ministers in important towns throughout the kingdom and whose careers were promoted by Lord James Stewart, the commendator of St Andrews. The priory of St Andrews served as a pool of resources from which ministers could be drawn to fill pastoral charges. Heriot, like John Duncanson in Stirling and Patrick Kinloch at Linlithgow, was Lord James's man and yet he was accepted without complaint by the burgesses. His salary was promptly fixed by the council and duly paid for the first two years of his ministry.³⁷ Heriot's appointment was definite policy decision since the local candidate, John Brabaner, who had functioned in Aberdeen in the years before the Reformation,³⁸ was passed over in his favour. The Lord James had taken the first step towards building up some kind of presence in Gordon territory and the burgesses, showing a keen appreciation of national political realities, had acted as his accomplices. The appointment of a client of Lord James to the parish kirk was a token of good faith on the part of the Council of Aberdeen. It served to distract attention from their deep-rooted conservatism whilst leading him to think that he could count on their co-operation in the event of

conflict with Huntly.

In August 1560 Thomas Menzies subscribed a petition to Queen Elizabeth requesting that she consider marriage to the earl of Arran.³⁹ This gesture was made in favour of one of the most volatile Protestant lords in the kingdom and brought the Menzies once more into association with the Hamilton interest against that of the Gordons.⁴⁰ The marriage proposal was designed by the Congregation to promote Anglo-Scottish amity in the hope of ensuring a permanent alliance and freedom from French influence.⁴¹ In October an embassy was despatched south to open negotiations for the marriage, but it returned home by January 1561 with its hopes unfulfilled. The Menzies involvement in the project was consistent with their support for the English alliance, an item of policy that had originally brought them into the Hamilton orbit in the 1540s and which had caused a profound breach with the Gordons.⁴² The advocacy of the Arran marriage was designed as another demonstration of Aberdeen's detachment from the Gordon interest and a signal to Lord James that the Protestant and anglophile sentiments of the burgesses could be relied upon. However, the increasing intrusion of international affairs on the internal politics of Scotland threatened to undermine the astute, if opportunist, schemes of the burgess aristocracy of Aberdeen under the leadership of Thomas Menzies.

The death of Francis II in December 1560 threw the various factions in Scotland into further uncertainty. Knox implied that it prompted a revival of hope amongst the conservatives.⁴³ Even before the king's death a meeting of the 'papists' had taken place at Dunbar, and the leading Catholic earls of Sutherland, Huntly and Eglinton were certainly privy to it. Professor Donaldson has argued that this was an exploratory meeting, perhaps designed to draw up a conservative case which

could be presented to the queen. Her possible return home as Queen of Scots without the threat of French domination was an added incentive to men like Huntly to commit themselves to her cause and the cause of Catholicism.

The return of the queen in August 1561 did nothing to satisfy the hopes of the conservatives since, almost immediately, she began manoeuvring around the subject which was to prove closest to her heart, the English succession. This was the cornerstone of her international and domestic programme during the first years of her reign and was to condition her relationships with her most powerful subjects, not all of whom were committed to her dynastic ambitions. An approach to England would involve a distancing from France and consequently hostility from amongst some of her pro-French nobles. In April 1561 Randolph had reported that Chatelherault and Huntly were 'like to become French again'.⁴⁴ Whereas Chatelherault was a political weathercock Huntly's reservations about rapprochement with England were based on a realisation that alliance would mean a policy of religious conformity and the end of the conservative cause, a prospect which he was not prepared to countenance.

Mary's choice of counsellors after her arrival proved something of an unpleasant surprise in the north-east of Scotland. In May, Throckmorton had assumed that she would come down in favour of those who shared her religious opinions and that chief amongst these would be the earl of Huntly.⁴⁵ She chose exactly the opposite course in the belief that by distancing herself from her Catholic subjects she would promote her campaign for the succession to Elizabeth. Mary was attempting to prove that her succession to the English throne need not necessarily involve a religious or political revolution and that she was prepared to be guided by even the most Protestant of advisers. In this regard her assiduous

cultivation of the Lord James and her consequent rejection of and coolness towards Huntly makes perfect sense. Huntly's fall in 1562 was brought about by his inability to believe that this alliance was anything but a temporary coalition; his destiny was intimately bound up with Mary's aspirations for acknowledgment as Elizabeth's heir. In many ways his fate was sealed in the first few months after Mary's return to Scotland and became more certain as negotiations with England proceeded.

Mary's determination to secure the promise of the English succession can be seen clearly in her dispatch of Maitland of Lethington to London to discuss the question soon after her landing at Leith.⁴⁶ In retrospect her attendance at Protestant ceremonies and her acceptance of the existing settlement seem opportunist, but no more so than was the behaviour of many of her subjects. The prospect of the succession appeared sufficiently promising in September 1561 to warrant such an attitude. How immediate the question was, and how close Mary was to the English throne became obvious when Elizabeth was struck down with smallpox in 1562.⁴⁷ Throughout the winter of 1561 and the following spring Mary invested considerable energy in arranging a meeting between the two queens. Her domestic policies were tailored to suit this grand design and to prove to Elizabeth her good intentions. Scotland for Mary was only a side-show in the far more exciting arena of European dynastic politics.

The debate on the future direction of Scottish policy was continued enthusiastically in the privy council. In September Mary confirmed Huntly as a member of the council, recognising his authority and attempting to secure a broad spectrum of representation.⁴⁸ He proved to be an outspoken, and to the queen's mind, indiscreet advocate of the conservative cause. In October a public dispute with Lord James took place in Mary's

presence with Huntly offering to set up the mass in three shires if the queen commanded it.⁴⁹ It was an advertisement that the queen's attitude would determine not only the success or failure of the Catholic cause, but also the survival or otherwise of the balance of relationships which had existed between the crown and principal magnates of the kingdom for the previous three decades. Mary's attitude to Catholicism and to the English succession would mean a decisive political shift involving the outflanking of the princes on whom the crown had traditionally relied. That Mary intended to raise the Lord James even higher and that she was contemplating such a political shift was obvious to the Spanish ambassador in London. De Quadra described for the Regent of the Netherlands how Lord James stood in highest favour with Queen Mary;⁵⁰ meanwhile Randolph was writing the same from Edinburgh to Cecil.⁵¹ At the same time Huntly was seen as the principal opponent of the English association and his rallying cry was taken to be the restoration of the mass.⁵² But even this watchword shows the confusion into which the various communities of the realm had fallen. Huntly's much vaunted Catholicism was a desperate attempt to prove some relationship or shared vision with a queen who seemed determined to undermine his role in the local community by excluding him from the national community. His appeal to the language of commission, the religious language of the community of the Old Kirk, is almost an admission of failure and despair rather than a proud boast. Not even the old religious certainties moved a young and politically radical queen, whose radicalism might extend to a change of faith should such a move seem necessary.

The English bias of Mary's policies alarmed even the French when various efforts were made to lure her away from her chosen course. They implicitly recognised Huntly's position as spokesman for the opposition

by prevailing on him to use his good offices with the queen to prevent any meeting between herself and Elizabeth.⁵³ However, his influence was waning by the hour and by the beginning of 1562 stood at a very low ebb. In January of that year Mary sealed her bond with Lord James by conferring on him the title of earl of Moray. The gift was recorded secretly and was not to be published until a later date.⁵⁴ It signified Mary's determination to evade alliance with Huntly and seems in effect to have been the opening shot in her campaign against the Gordons, a campaign which was bound to affect the internal polity of the burgh of Aberdeen.

On 12 January 1562 the provost of the burgh of Aberdeen announced that he had been 'suirle informit' that the queen intended to visit the town between Easter of that year and the following Easter. The council agreed unanimously that a sum of 2,000 merks should be set aside for the decoration of the town on the queen's arrival.⁵⁵ Thus in the same month that Lord James received confirmation of his new earldom of Moray, the provost of Aberdeen was informed of a royal visit. Early on in her reign the queen had decided on a visit to the north-east, a decision which may have been taken as early as May 1561 in France when she received John Leslie, Huntly's envoy. Mary's visit to the north was designed to establish the new earl of Moray as a major force in the region. Her determination to promote Lord James Stewart to power and influence in the region showed a complete failure to understand the political and economic exigencies of the north-east, and her determination to alter the constitutional equilibrium of the country. Huntly was by far the largest landowner in the area and his holdings were at least twice as valuable as those of his nearest competitor.⁵⁶ In order to challenge a century of the gradual consolidation of Gordon power, Moray would have needed a con-

siderable following of his own, together with the resources to offer patronage and reward in return for good service. In 1562 he did not have such a base, and a simple display of royal favour could not secure it for him.

The prospect of a royal visit greatly alarmed the burgesses of Aberdeen who feared that their newly-established reformed polity would not stand close inspection by the more rigorously Protestant of the queen's advisors. It also stimulated them to attempt to retain some of the corporate ecclesiastical wealth of the burgh in the hands of the community.

Aberdeen was late in disposing of its ecclesiastical treasures. Edinburgh was committed to selling off its ecclesiastical patrimony by August 1560. Dundee had been more prompt in auctioning its vestments in August 1559 and also more ideologically sure by binding the purchasers so to alter them, that they would never 'serve in Papistrie here-after'.⁵⁷ Stirling waited until April 1561 before beginning to sell the plate and vestments. Compared to all of these major burghs of the realm, Aberdeen was slow in acting. One of the principal reasons for this dilatoriness was undoubtedly the caution of the burgesses. They had no desire to dispose of the ecclesiastical riches of the parish kirk, although they would have raised a tidy sum either melted down or more probably exported to Catholic Flanders, since they represented centuries of burgh wealth and prestige as well as burgess investment, until they were sure that the religious changes were permanent.

Caution and unwillingness to take precipitate action had always characterised the council's attitude to the kirk plate which was seen as a burgh resource. In January 1560 four burgesses had been appointed to keep it safe.⁵⁸ All of the commissioners were prominent burgesses and members of the council. Three of them were aligned with the conservative

interest and had objected to the attacks on the friaries and to the attempt to force the burgh into association with the Congregation.⁵⁹ The fourth member of the commission, Gilbert Malison, a prominent craftsman and an elder on the kirk session of 1562, may have been included on the commission more for his professional expertise than his religious convictions. This was the second such commission.

In June 1559 the chaplains of St Nicholas had originally consigned their plate to the care of a commission of burgesses.⁶⁰ Their concern for its safety had arisen because of the news of the attacks on kirks in the south. A change in the composition of the original commission became necessary after the association of the burgh with the Congregation in January 1560. Gilbert Malison remained on the commission but the other members were new to it: Master Patrick Rutherford, Alexander Knowles and John Lowson.⁶¹ All four of the commissioners appeared as members of the kirk session of 1562,⁶² although at least two of them, Alexander Knowles, the father of the bishop's concubine⁶³ and John Lowson, the provost's son-in-law,⁶⁴ had links with the conservative camp. On the whole the second commission presented a more neutral aspect than the first.

The saga of the kirk plate shows not only the caution of the burgesses but also their thrift with regard to burgh resources. Their decision to preserve the burgh plate was in line with this attitude as also was their decision to sell it. The announcement of the queen's visit prompted them to move rapidly. The kirk plate doubtless presented a tempting prospect not only to visiting members of the queen's entourage but even to the queen herself since she was not above appropriating the riches and endowments of the old Kirk. The treasures of Aberdeen cathedral which fell into her hands after the battle of Strathbogie were to

prove an unexpected windfall in this regard. In 1562 she did not hesitate to reward her friends with the furnishings of one of the major cathedrals in the north-east and the burgesses had no desire to see their own burgh investments at risk.⁶⁵

Within a fortnight of the announcement of the queen's visit various items from the ecclesiastical patrimony had been assembled and offered for public sale.⁶⁶ Patrick Menzies, the town's treasurer offered £142 for the vestments, twenty one shillings for each ounce of silver and sixteen shillings for each stone of brass. The entire collection raised £540 Scots which suggests that Menzies was getting a bargain.⁶⁷ This sum was to be 'applyit for the commond weill and necessar adois of this guid toun, as the haill communitie sall think expedient'.⁶⁸ The degree of acceptance of the establishment of the Reformation, at least on a temporary basis, is apparent from the lack of opposition to this sale. Only Gilbert Menzies the younger and Gilbert Collison were recorded as protesting for themselves and their 'adherans'. Although the 'adherans' are not listed it is significant that whereas a sizeable number of burgesses and council members had objected to Protestantising activity in 1560 only two were recorded as objecting in January 1562.⁶⁹ It could be that the Protestant faction received their support mainly from those inhabitants of the burgh who did not form part of the governing class in the town and whose names would not need to be recorded. It may also be that the mood in Aberdeen reflected that in the rest of the country, a mood of acceptance fostered by the queen's own apparent tolerance for Protestantism.

In February 1562 Mary gave further advertisement of her intentions by agreeing to a system of financing the new Kirk at the same time pressing for a meeting between herself and Elizabeth.⁷⁰ Randolph reported

that the prospect of the meeting caused further divisions in the country, with the Catholic party decidedly against it and the Protestants vehemently in favour of it.⁷¹ Meanwhile Lord James took further steps to promote his potential power base in the north by forging an alliance with the Earl Marischal by marrying his daughter.⁷² Marischal was the only respectable Protestant rival to Huntly in the north-east. Mary gave another sign of her favour by conferring on Lord James the title of earl of Mar. His title was disputed by the Erskines but at least it provided adequate cover to hide his forthcoming earldom of Moray,⁷³ since Mary did not wish to engineer a premature conflict with Huntly.

The agreement in principle to a meeting between the two queens was given by the Scottish Privy Council in May 1562, and early in June Elizabeth consented to a meeting between July and August at Nottingham.⁷⁴ Huntly had been a consistent attender at the privy council since his nomination to it by the queen in September 1561. Apart from an absence of a few weeks in November and December 1561, he was present for the majority of the meetings in the early months of 1562. However, he did not attend the meeting of 19 May which approved the prospect of the English meeting; neither did he appear at the council again before his death in October.⁷⁵ His decline from favour coincided more or less exactly with the increasing likelihood of a meeting with Elizabeth. In June, when the meeting seemed certain, Randolph was able to report that Huntly held no credit with the queen and that France was very disturbed at the project.⁷⁶

It was the conspiracy of international events which was to seal Huntly's fate more than any other factor. A reckoning with Gordon power may have seemed inevitable to Lord James and Mary at some point in the future but it was brought decidedly closer by the religious troubles which erupted in France in June and July 1562. Elizabeth was forced to abandon

the meeting which admirably suited Huntly and the duke of Chatelherault who had been consistently attempting to undermine it.⁷⁷ One of the main reasons for postponing the meeting was the disadvantage that would accrue to Elizabeth if she associated with a member of the house of Guise. It was in the interests of Elizabeth to prove her distance from such an association and her independence of action. News of the postponement was brought to Scotland by Sir Henry Sidney in July, and brought the queen and Lord James intense disappointment.⁷⁸ The scheme to visit the north of the country arose from these circumstances and was conditioned by them. The only previous mention of a proposed visit to the north had been in January. The queen had hoped to be in England in July and August, so her visit in Aberdeen appears, in the circumstances, to have been a hurried and precipitate affair undertaken before the autumn set in and travelling became difficult.

One of the chief threats to the current trend of Mary's policy had been the possibility of a coalition between the two nobles who were the most discontented, the duke of Chatelherault and the earl of Huntly. Both had received invitations to come to court in 1562 and both had refused, Huntly because of a sore leg and Chatelherault because of a sore arm. The prospect of a coalition against closer ties with England looked less remote towards the end of 1562. Knox remarked, possibly unreliably, that Huntly had sent his son, Lord Gordon, to the west, where recent Catholic demonstrations had taken place,⁷⁹ in response to the duke of Chatelherault asking him 'to put his hands in the South, as he should do in the North'. In response to this threat in the west Master George Hay, subsequently commissioner for Aberdeen, in company with John Knox himself, began a preaching campaign which was supported by the Protestand Bond of Ayr.⁸⁰ The queen's journey to the north was a demonstration that she was

prepared to distance herself from France and the conservative cause by sacrificing a northern earl who had become too powerful. Lord James had a personal interest in the region, and a success there would overawe the other rival to his own power, the duke of Chatelherault in the west. The expedition to the north was a demonstration to Elizabeth who was troubled by her own conservative north and powerful northern earls. In order to ensure that Elizabeth was fully apprised of the progress of the expedition, Randolph, the English ambassador, was brought along to send her reports.⁸¹

Lord James's interests in the north were not simply colonial; he was also concerned to reduce the power of conservative opinion and strengthen the reformed faith. Aberdeen and the north-east was a strong-hold of Catholic sympathisers who were found in every sector of society. Even after Huntly's fall the General Assembly continued to complain that measures for the furtherance of the Reformation were especially called for in Aberdeenshire.⁸² The cause of the Reformation in the north and the establishment of Lord James's authority there became twin pillars of royal policy. It is significant that at the same time as the queen began her progress to the north, the Protestant preachers were sent out to prepare the way for her and her half-brother; Knox went to the west but Christopher Goodman took the road to the north.⁸³

Goodman had served as minister to the English congregation at Geneva and was friend not only of Knox but also an intimate of Lord James who referred to him as 'my greyt freynd'.⁸⁴ Lord James's intention was obviously to promote an expansion of Protestantism in the north-east which would prepare for his own arrival on the scene. The queen did not inhibit this plan in any way although it might be thought to have struck at her own religious loyalties. Randolph noted how her arrival in

Aberdeen was the signal for the intensification of the preacher's efforts and he confesses that he had never witnessed such violent evangelical activity before.⁸⁵

There is a hint in the burgh records that the queen's visit to Aberdeen was sooner than expected. On 26 August Master Robert Lumsden explained to the whole town on behalf of the council that there was not enough money in the town's coffers to cover the cost of the propine to be given to the queen,⁸⁶ despite the recent profit made on the sale of the kirk treasures. Part of the problem arose out of the absence from the town of those who should have contributed to the stent levies to meet the cost of receiving the queen. Lumsden added that the money could not be obtained from them 'in consideratioun of the schortness of the tyme'. The burgh viewed this absence very seriously and those who had not contributed to the stent were deprived of their freedom; this still left the council with the problem of covering the cost of the visit. Lumsden related how the council had met several times to discuss the matter and had decided to set the small customs of the burgh for ten years and the mills of the town in assedation for nineteen years to the provost, Thomas Menzies. All of this was done 'because the tyme is schort'. In many ways this was a panic measure by the council and it dramatically increased the power of the Menzies family who had already benefitted from the sale of the kirk treasures. It was the queen's proximity and a privy council meeting which had been held at Edzell on 25 August, the day before Lumsden addressed the town,⁸⁷ that had forced the burgesses' hands. On 27 August the queen was actually in the burgh, so the capital resources of the Menzies family came to the rescue just in time.

The Menzies family had once more been the chief beneficiaries of the town's misfortunes. Their capital resources could be contrasted with

the apparent poverty of the common good. Although they were members of the conservative body of opinion, that lobby that Lord James hoped to neutralise during his visit to the north, their power and economic resources were actually increased as a direct result of that visit. The opposition to the selling of the small customs and the mills to the Menzies was concentrated in a small group of burgesses with strong Protestant leanings, John Tullidaff, Master Duncan Forbes and Walter Cullen, subsequently reader in the parish kirk,⁸⁸ who were all involved in the Protestant establishment of the town. Thomas Rolland, the nephew of Duncan Forbes, together with John Tullidaff, had objected to the earlier plundering of the town's resources when the burgh lands and fishings were set in feu in 1551.⁸⁹ Despite their opposition, the town eventually agreed to the disposal of part of their resources. The burgh had no desire to offend the queen since her hostility to Huntly was becoming more obvious and they had no desire to be implicated in his fall. Nevertheless the Menzies family were not without their opponents in the burgh and their opposition stretched further back than the establishment of the Reformation in the burgh. This opposition was to be further stressed in years to come, and the members of this group were to prove useful tools when the time came for central government to win allies in the burgh against its hereditary rulers.

Huntly was treated with considerable coolness from the outset of Mary's visit to Aberdeen. She refused to visit him at Strathbogie and signalled by her attitude that he had fallen from favour.⁹⁰ The irresponsible behaviour of Sir John Gordon and the refusal of the keeper of Inverness castle to yield it to the queen provided her with sufficient grounds for beginning the offensive.⁹¹ Huntly seemed reluctant to enter into open revolt against the queen, and instead hoped to intimidate her by the size

of his forces. Randolph reported that on the road to Inverness Huntly had planned to engage the royal army at the Spey with 1,000 horse and foot, but that Mary's own force amounted to 3,000.⁹² Her confidence in her own victory and her unwillingness to compromise are well illustrated by her public naming of Lord James as earl of Moray at Darnaway castle, the seat of the earls of Moray.⁹³

By the time Mary was back in Aberdeen on 22 October the burgesses had realised where events were leading. A few days before, on 17 of the month, they had ordered that the ports of the town, together with the rest of its defences, be strengthened.⁹⁴ They also took advantage of the recent legislation concerning the thirds of benefices to cease paying their minister and laid that particular responsibility to the bishop's charge.⁹⁵ The money saved was doubtless useful in covering the expenditure on the town's fortifications. Huntly still seems to have hoped for some measure of reconciliation, despite the evidence that the queen was far from favourably disposed towards him.

The earl and his wife believed that an appeal to Mary's Catholicism would ensure an accommodation with her. It is a measure of their misjudgement of Mary's own personal religious opinions and her political cynicism that such an appeal increased her determination to destroy them. Huntly was not brought down despite his Catholicism but precisely because of it. When Maitland of Lethington arrived at Strathbogie in the hope of taking the earl by surprise, Lady Huntly, in her husband's absence, showed him the chapel where all was in readiness for the queen to have her mass when she should visit the castle.⁹⁶ Huntly's stress on Catholicism made it all the more important to the queen to demonstrate that she could not be moved by such a claim. On 16 October Huntly was put to the horn and few days later brought to his defeat and death at the

battle of Corrichie.⁹⁷ The queen's acknowledgement of a shared religious community with Huntly would have undermined her credibility in the eyes of her supporters, and entirely subverted her purpose in making an example of the earl.

The most dramatic failure of 1562 was the almost complete disfunctioning of the Gordon alliance system. All of the bonds of manrent entered into by the earl from 1534 had included a clause reserving loyalty to the crown. Therefore in the event of rebellion against the queen Huntly could not rely on his clientage to follow him. Some of the principal Gordon lairds, including those who were formerly numbered amongst his closest associates, specifically dissociated themselves from the rebellion. Gordon of Gight, the Gordons of Haddo, Abergeldy, Lesmoir, Strathavon, Crichton, Auchmany and Craig agreed before the privy council to enter into ward in the south before the battle of Corrichie.⁹⁸ In former days some of them had been trusted confidants of the earl. In 1548, during his imprisonment in England, the earl had entrusted the negotiation of the marriage of one of his daughters with the son of Lord Forbes to Gordon of Gight, Gordon of Lesmoir and Gordon of Strathavon, acting as advisers to the countess of Huntly.⁹⁹ Admittedly Gordon of Strathavon and Gordon of Lesmoir attempted to soften the blow of their defection by allowing their sons to take part in the rebellion, but their lack of support illustrates the lack of credibility from which Huntly's cause suffered.¹⁰⁰

With the approach of a battle Huntly's local support dwindled drastically. On 28 October Randolph had reported to Cecil that the earl had the support of 700, consisting mainly of his friends, tenants and their servants, most of whom left him before the battle.¹⁰¹ Other estimates have placed Huntly's support at no more than 500.¹⁰² The

majority of his supporters came from amongst the Gordon lairds, twenty-eight of whom are named in the remission which was finally granted for the rebellion in February 1567.¹⁰³ The most important lairds in this category refused to support him. Two days before Corrichie ten of the leading Gordon cadet families appeared in the presence of the queen and privy council in Aberdeen and set guarantees of caution that they would enter into ward until freed by the queen. Some of these found their cautioners amongst the local landed families and others amongst the burgesses of Aberdeen. William Cheyne of Straloch acted as cautioner for the laird of Gight and Gordon of Craig, Irvine of Drum for the laird of Abergeldy, the provost of Aberdeen for Gordon of Haddo and Master Robert Lumsden for Gordon of Auchmany. All of them were to enter into ward in the safe territories of Edinburgh, St Andrews or Haddington, places where the influence of the earl of Moray was high.¹⁰⁴ The Gordon alliance had broken down in the face of royal firmness and association with Protestantism. The burgesses of Aberdeen had managed to hold aloof from the fight and emerge comparatively unscathed. Their own distance from Huntly is seen in their willingness to act as cautioners for the Gordon lairds, and the provost's own trustworthiness in the royal cause is clear in that when Sir John Gordon was ordered to surrender himself in September 1562 he was ordered to enter into ward in the provost's house.¹⁰⁵

The support of Huntly's affinity was absolutely necessary if he was to overawe the queen and show that not only the force of his authority in the region but also his 'honour' was recognised. His visits to Aberdeen in strength and his display of strength were designed to convince the queen of the advisability of accepting his counsel and allying with him. Her refusal to co-operate with his view of the appropriate constitutional relationship between crown and magnate undermined his standing

with his supporters. They were not prepared to risk all in what appeared to be a lost cause, neither were they agreeable to being drawn into a fight to save Gordon honour. The power and prestige of the monarchy had been increased in the localities by the success of its regional agents and magnates, and that power, present personally, could function successfully even in the face of opposition from its principal local agent.

The accepted relationship between crown and magnate was paralleled and reflected in the ideal relationship between magnate and client. Just as the sovereign was the focus of loyalty and unity within the kingdom so was the territorial magnate expected to be in his lordship. However, the various ties of kinship and clientage were not only vertical, converging in the person of the earl of Huntly, they were also lateral extending into a network of alliances between the earl and local lairds, and the local lairds and the more prominent burgess families in Aberdeen. There existed a kaleidoscopic pattern of concerns which did not form one single thread linking the various sectional interests within the Gordon association.

In the previous half-century the wealthiest burgesses in Aberdeen had been busily burrowing their way into gentry society by judicious purchases of land and prudent and ambitious marriage alliances, and the Menzies family are a good example of this process at work.¹⁰⁶ The richly dowered daughters of the burgesses proved to be a very tempting prospect to the local lairds, as did the commercial and continental contacts of their fathers and brothers. The considerable reserve of capital which the burgesses seemed to be able to dispose of at short notice also proved useful to the lairds in times of financial hardship. These factors can be seen at work in the surrender of the prominent Gordons to the privy council in Aberdeen in 1562. The cautioners for them were all related

by marriage to the lairds who agreed to go into ward. Thus the laird of Haddo was married to the daughter of Gilbert Menzies of Findon, former provost of Aberdeen. His brother-in-law, Thomas Menzies, provost of Aberdeen, was able to offer a caution of 5,000 merks for him. Alexander Irvine of Drum, himself married to the earl Marischal's daughter, offered 5,000 merks security for his son-in-law Gordon of Abergeldy. Gordon of Gight was underwritten by his brother's father-in-law, Cheyne of Straloch, whilst Gordon of Lesmoir received help from his father-in-law Forbes of Tolquhon.¹⁰⁷ The patterns of kinship and alliance were complex and did not necessarily need the earl to bind them together. Indeed if the earl's interests conflicted with the narrower and more local concerns of his client families, the local was frequently preferred to the national.

The client families of the earl of Huntly, and the web of kinship enjoyed by the lairds in general, had plainly grown in independence and assurance over the decades before Corrichie. The county gentry had achieved status and experience as administrators ensuring a measure of order in the locality. Powerful nobles depended on the co-operation of lesser families to make their authority real within the bounds of their lordship. The frequent absence of successive earls from their territorial power base devolved more influence on the lesser lairds. That this power was generally exercised in the maintenance of order is clear from the activity of Leslie of Balquhain in 1560. His defence, in concert with the earl of Huntly, of the ecclesiastical patrimony of Aberdeen and Old Aberdeen in 1560, although it may have been motivated by a sense of religious conservatism was also informed by a sense of responsibility.¹⁰⁸ Successive Leslies had acted as sheriffs-depute for the earl of Huntly: it was therefore incumbent upon them to ensure good order.

In many ways the general phenomenon of increased participation

by the lairds in the direction of national affairs was prompted by increasing involvement in local affairs. The lairds were becoming the social cement which bound the locality together; their influence crossed the boundaries dividing town and country and linked them both to the aristocracy, represented by the earl of Huntly, and the urban aristocracy embodied in the burgess elite of Aberdeen. Their connections with the burgesses gave them an enviable influence in the burgh through marriage ties. The earl of Huntly had often sought such influence but had persistently failed to achieve it to their satisfaction. It could be argued that it was not so much the queen and the earl of Moray who defeated Huntly in 1562 as the lairds who refused to support him. He was a victim of the effectiveness of his own administration.

Mary's defeat of the earl of Huntly in 1562 did not only rid her of a powerful obstacle to her English plans, but administered a severe shock to the traditional polity of the north-east. Her victory called into question the constitutional balance of the country as it had developed over the previous century. It is clear from her actions in the north that she failed to understand the long-accepted relationship between crown and nobility thought necessary for peace and good government. Huntly was broken not because he was an over-mighty subject, but because he was powerful and in the way, his ruin being accomplished pour encourager les autres. In November 1562 Maitland of Lethington wrote to Cecil claiming that he should have no fear of Mary's partiality to Catholics should she be accepted as successor to Elizabeth. Her behaviour in the north and her distancing herself from her Catholic subjects should have proved her to be free of such partiality.¹⁰⁹

However, by bringing about the earl's downfall and laying claims to direct obedience from the localities, Mary was cutting across the various

forms of aristocratic leadership, kinship, clientage and local influence, upon which the crown had not only relied in the past but actively sought to increase and support.¹¹⁰ A good example of how different her understanding, formed largely at the French court, of power and the exercise of royal authority was can be seen in her treatment of the unfortunate keeper of the castle of Inverness. His refusal to surrender his charge to the queen without the authority of his kinsman and her officer, the earl of Huntly, should not be seen as an act of open rebellion but a result of the unutterable confusion into which her direct and autocratic actions had plunged the region.¹¹¹ Moreover, the castle itself was largely the work of Gordon investment. The third earl had been appointed sheriff and keeper of Inverness with power to garrison and add to the fortifications of the castle in 1509. At the same time he was ordered to build a stone hall, kitchen and chapel within the ramparts at his own expense.¹¹² Whilst the castle was undoubtedly the crown's it had been built largely by the Gordons and entrusted to their care for over fifty years.

Huntly's fall left a vacuum in the north which Mary did not think about filling, least of all by encouraging the ambitions of her brother. Ironically her inactivity far from threatening local conservative opinion actually insulated it from further threat for some years to come by taking it out of the arena of national politics. Mary's ambition proved too great, and her sense of governmental reality too small. She did not comprehend that the honour of her estate rested on that of her nobles; the craggy independence and rough counsel she experienced from them seemed too much like disobedience. When she was powerless to confute them she sought to outflank them, and what should have been astute diplomacy occasionally appeared more like government by whim.

The two themes of honour and good government established by tradition were the stimulus under which Huntly acted in 1562. It was the queen's failure to comprehend either of them that brought about Huntly's fall and the temporary de-stabilisation of the north-east. The requirements of honour and the role of the magnate demanded that a strong sense of solidarity be expressed between the lord and the region he represented. This solidarity should be visible in the ties of loyalty, blood and allegiance created within the regional society. Successive earls acknowledged that the honour they sought demanded solidarity with and incorporation into the nexus of local kinship groups. The Gordon family was to be the focus and bond of unity within this web of relationships, hence the number and variety of the bonds of manrent engaged in by the fourth earl. The third earl had largely constructed the territorial integrity of the earldom; it was left to his grandson to expand the 'affinity'. A number of lesser lords and lairds' families were willing to assist the Gordons in this process, creating a kind of court with a code of conduct that mirrored the relationship between crown and magnate. The fourth earl's bonds of manrent provided him not only with an outwork of protection and a facility of administration, but also a framework of display of honour and power appropriate to a territorial lord. The ties of a lineage society were successfully linked through marriage, patronage and service to the Gordons, who were able to project an image of a social structure that formed an integral part of the natural order. The whole thrust of Gordon policy throughout the sixteenth century was to create a picture of an ancient lineage rooted in the soil of a territorial lordship. They hoped to ensure that any challenge to the 'ancient blood' would bring down the whole edifice of regional society including its ties of kin and lordship.

The wisdom of the policy of territorial investment and the resulting increase in the Gordon fortunes can be clearly seen in the surviving 1554 stent roll for the shire of Aberdeen.¹¹³ The earl of Huntly paid just over 14% of the total collected for the county. His contribution of £200 exceeded his nearest rival, the earl of Erroll by £100 with Lord Elphinstone next at £60. The Earl Marischal paid only £4 for his lands in the county suggesting clearly the meagre extent of his territorial holdings there, which were in fact matched by those of Thomas Menzies of Pitfoddels who paid £4 for the lands he held in the shire. The earl of Huntly's disposal of lands and money in favour of bonds of manrent emphasises not only his fortune but also his determination that it should purchase him security and standing in the region.

Throughout the 1550s and 1560s Huntly comported himself as a great territorial lord. Even his gilded armour at Pinkie was a statement of his role in the kingdom, a role implied in Douglas's Palice of Honour and one that was respected by the sovereign.¹¹⁴ Even Mary of Guise did not deprive the earl of all honour when pursuing her policy of employing French officers of state. She may have employed de Rubay as vice-chancellor in effect responsible for the chancellor's work but she left Huntly with the title. Her daughter showed herself intent on nothing less than the earl's total humiliation and deprivation of all prestige. This is the only way to understand her extension of the disgrace to the earl's corpse dragging it to Edinburgh to undergo a macabre trial and condemnation.¹¹⁵ This elaborate pantomime cannot have given his fellow nobles any real satisfaction or consolation. Its chief result seems to have been to encourage the young and inexperienced queen in over-estimating her own power and ability.

The sudden fall of the earl and the waning of what had been seen as

one of the greatest power blocs in the country calls into question the effectiveness of Gordon influence in the north-east, and the soundness of the policies employed in constructing it. In a lineage society, such as the earls had attempted to create, dominated by the bonds of kinship and alliance, loyalty to the crown was often neglected in the event of crown-magnate conflict. This conspicuously failed to occur in 1562; in fact the Huntly alliance system totally collapsed. The concerns which were so obviously close to the earl of Huntly were not shared by his client lairds. Their support was absolutely necessary if his rebellion was to have any chance of success. In fact the alliance system more or less entirely failed to function leaving the earl isolated.

One of the pre-suppositions of such a society was that the continued inheritance of the 'true blood' guaranteed stability and that such stability would be threatened in the event of a disinheritance of that blood in favour of the intrusion of alien landlords. The dominant mood of this society was inevitably one of intense conservatism. In the mid-1550s Mary of Guise had sought to circumvent the 'true blood' of Scotland by the employment of French officials and the deployment of Scottish resources in the interests of alien landlords. This had caused considerable disquiet to the earl of Huntly amongst others and may have been influential in winning his support for the Congregation in 1560. In 1562 Mary Queen of Scots was following an analogous policy; her interest in Scotland was marginal in that she saw it largely as a stepping stone to something better. Her policies were bound to appear radical and to conflict with those of some at least of her nobles.

The lairds did not necessarily share Huntly's alarm. The Gordons had been raised by royal favour; they depended on it in order to exercise power and influence in the localities. The local families had become

used over the generations to a series of magnates exercising that role, and the Gordons were not indispensable to their understanding of that polity especially at the expense of loyalty to the sovereign. Protection and patronage, good lordship and loyal service could only be exercised if the magnate at the head of the locality was in receipt of good lordship from above. If this were not so then his own system of alliances could melt away as Huntly's did before Corrichie. The earl was operating with a concept of government different from the queen's. Mary, probably tinged with the French understanding of monarchy, was ignorant of the realities of government. Her lack of experience proved an unexpected windfall to the earl of Moray who understood such realities only too well, and was more than willing to exploit his sister's weakness.

The breaking-point for relations between Huntly and the queen was the question of the English succession. In the course of that disagreement the various factors illustrating both the tenor of and strains on the crown-magnate relationship were clearly seen. For the earl of Huntly, and for his contemporaries in Scotland and in Europe as a whole, the giving of counsel was understood as a prime expression of aristocratic power and responsibility.¹¹⁶ His dispatch of Leslie to France to visit the queen before her return home can be seen not only as an attempt to win the support of an inexperienced sovereign ignorant of Scottish politics, but also as a serious exercise of the duty of giving counsel. Similarly his prolonged absence from the privy council in the months before Corrichie was not a demonstration of disaffection but a warning to the queen that she was neglecting his proper function and failing to live up to her responsibilities. As a demonstration it was a failure since Mary had already determined on a single item of policy, the succession to the English throne. The negative result of his absence was the disruption

of personal contacts between the crown and one of the leading magnates, contacts which were so important in the lack of any further institutional means of expressing dissent short of rebellion.

Mary's defeat of Huntly was an example of direct action by the crown in a locality which had hitherto shown total loyalty to the sovereign. By achieving her purpose she incidentally began to undermine the foundations of royal power as it had been consolidated over a century. It had been taken as axiomatic that the level of local autonomy should not be reduced since that would also involve the corresponding reduction in the level of royal authority.¹¹⁷ Mary systematically broke down all personal links with the earl, isolating him from the court, and by her humiliation of him weakened his prestige in the eyes of his clientage. Her final mistake was to ally herself with faction in the person of the earl of Moray and the Protestant party, thereby tarnishing the image of the crown as the focus of unity and loyalty. Her feeble attempts to re-assure the conservatives and her support of the Catholic ecclesiastical establishment in Old Aberdeen in 1562 could only have served to irritate Moray and his supporters whilst not encouraging the traditionalists to place their trust in her, especially with the example of Corrichie before them.¹¹⁸

With the fall of Huntly Moray was offered room to begin consolidating his power base and a party of supporters in the region. Randolph, duly impressed by Mary's attitude to Huntly, reported that 'men have great hope that the earl of Moray will do much good in this country. His power of men is great ...'.¹¹⁹ Certainly Moray's financial situation was sharply improved to the tune of 1,000 merks a year with the acquisition of the revenues of his new earldom. However, he was not unmindful of his duty towards the Reformed Kirk. Aberdeen university was still a

nest of Catholic academics and although the number of students there seems to have been small its symbolic importance was great.¹²⁰ Despite Moray's power being high at the time he was not in a strong or confident enough position to make any moves against it. Moreover the queen, for some mysterious reason of her own, had forestalled any such measure by her charter of confirmation to the college issued during her stay in Aberdeen.¹²¹ Moray's influence was most strongly felt in the establishment of the structure of congregational church government in the burgh, even if the burgesses did their best to tailor it to their liking. In November the kirk session of Aberdeen was established and its elders and deacons nominated.¹²² This marked a further step along the road of acceptance of the Reformation in the burgh, albeit achieved through external promptings. However, by judicious co-operation with forces that were too strong for them to challenge, the burgesses were to retain considerable control over their own destinies; it was better to their mind to bend rather than break.

The fall of Huntly and the inroads made into Gordon power after the battle of Corrichie presented a severe shock to the long-established political structures in the north-east. Its implications for the conservative cause were obvious to those who had seen Huntly as its champion. In January 1563 a ship conveying the earl of Bothwell to France was arrested and letters discovered aboard addressed to Archbishop Beaton in Paris from Scottish clerics lamenting the fall of Huntly, 'the staff of that realm', as he was termed.¹²³ In the burgh of Aberdeen one of the principal threats to burgh independence was removed, and free of Huntly the burgesses could hope to pursue a more independent line of policy insulated from the conflict between crown and magnate. The defeat of Huntly at Corrichie was by no means a disaster for the burgh of

Aberdeen: it did not lose a defender, but a continual source of threat and anxiety was removed from local politics. The problem facing the burgh was how and by whom the vacuum was to be filled.

The expediency of Mary's policy in the north-east and the real nature of Gordon power there is clear from the aftermath of Corrichie. No consistent attempt was made to dismantle the infra-structure of the earl's influence. The bonds of manrent that had not been activated in 1562 did not fail some years later during the civil war. In 1568 a large number of northern lairds joined the fifth earl in signing a bond for the queen's service at Huntly castle.¹²⁴ Amongst these were three of the Gordon lairds who had failed to follow the fourth earl in 1562. The prospect of serving for the queen and not against her drastically altered their interpretation of loyalty owed to the head of their kin. The other signatories included John Grant of Freuchy, whose father had signed a bond of manrent with the fourth earl in 1546;¹²⁵ Lachlan Mackintosh, the chief of Clan Chattan who had also signed a bond with the fourth earl, and Master Duncan Forbes of Monymusk, one of the prominent burgesses of Aberdeen who subscribed a bond of manrent in 1560. This network of association and support was not dismantled by Mary after Corrichie, which was in some ways fortunate for her since it could be re-activated and used for her service during the civil war. The queen's failure in 1562 suggests that she had no long-term aims in ruining the fourth earl, other than making an example of him to please Elizabeth. Moreover, no attempt was made to fill the ensuing power vacuum. The queen's impetuosity and unpredictability did not permit Moray to advance his ambitions in the north-east. The restoration of the fifth earl to his lands and titles was easily accomplished and he soon fitted into the space left by his father.

The fourth earl of Huntly was by no means lacking in character or intelligence, as his judicious construction of an alliance system shows, and his defeat in 1562 cannot be attributed to an absence of either. Apart from allying with client nobles such as the earl of Crawford and Lord Lovat, he attempted on several occasions to effect an alliance with the Forbes, thereby hoping to prevent a renewal of the regular conflict between their houses, and removing a potential source of danger that successive governments were not slow to exploit. He also aimed to construct the beginnings of a party in Aberdeen.

The earl of Huntly's initial attempts to win control of the burgh in the 1540s had achieved only temporary success and been disrupted by his imprisonment in England.¹²⁶ However, he was not discouraged from trying again in later years. In 1560, on the eve of the Reformation, he signed a bond of manrent with Master Duncan Forbes, a burghess who was favourably inclined to Protestantism and who had begun to build his fortune on the basis of ecclesiastical property in the area.¹²⁷ In Forbes he chose wisely and well since his new client had opposed the ruling Menzies family on a number of occasions in the past. Huntly must have hoped that Forbes would act as a useful counter-balance to the power of the Menzies who had grown too powerful to be treated simply as executives of Gordon power in the burgh. Their gradual increase in fortune and their links with local lairds had increased their independence of the earl.

One episode in particular reveals the earl's lack of political weight in the burgh and his need to establish new patterns of influence there. In January 1559 the town of Aberdeen refused to grant his request that the burgh lands of Ardlair be given to one of his allies, William Leslie, the son of Leslie of Balquhain. Because the lands were of

such strategic importance in the rivalry between the Leslie and the Forbes, the town refused to comply. Moreover each burgess was asked his opinion in turn according to the order laid down in the 'suit rol'. It was perfectly obvious who was against the earl and none of the burgesses felt the need for confidentiality.¹²⁸ The earl's power in the town must therefore have been at a fairly low ebb on the eve of the Reformation and this may partly account for the failure of the burgh to support him in 1562.

The pattern of his alliance system, and his inclusion of Forbes within it, discloses that the earl did not simply draw his support from amongst Catholics and conservatives. Forbes was a Protestant and Thomas Menzies a Catholic, yet the former supported Huntly and the latter did not. Similarly at Corrichie a large number of conservative sympathisers stayed away from the battle. This again raises the question of the allegedly paramount role exercised by the earls of Huntly in the survival of Catholicism.

The fall of the fourth earl did hardly anything to alter the balance of the religious life of the region. Its political life was only marginally affected, mainly because of Mary's ineptitude and the earl of Moray's lack of a significant power base in the region. In many areas there was no change, which accounts for the fifth earl's re-assertion of control during the civil war. The fourth earl was a Catholic and the fifth earl was a dubious Protestant; the former was not supported by many of his Catholic clients whereas the latter was. If the relationship between magnate and affinity was one of counsel and consent, it cannot be the case that Catholicism survived through the unrestricted exercise of authoritarian influence emanating from Strathbogie. The earls of Huntly were likely to remain Catholic sympathisers because their

power was largely derived from Catholic supporters. Catholicism was built into the regional structures of social and political life and it was to prove a long time before they could be dismantled. Protestantism was experienced primarily as a disintegrative force which threatened the established pattern of order and questioned the long accepted opinions which had acquired the status of immutable certainties.

The immediate effect of Corrichie in Aberdeen was to discourage one or two waverers amongst the Catholic clergy from continuing their passive resistance to the Reformation. In February 1563 Master Andrew Leslie, one of the chaplains of the parish kirk and later sheriff clerk in Aberdeen, submitted to the kirk and agreed to attend the common prayers in the parish kirk, thus being allowed to draw the revenues from his chaplaincy.¹²⁹ Later on in February Master Andrew Gray, another of the chaplains of St Nicholas, left Aberdeen to live on the continent, appointing his brother as procurator to supervise the collection of his income at home and to be responsible for forwarding it to him.¹³⁰

The chaplains of St Nicholas were not the only ones to see the signs of the times; in May 1563 Mary turned her attention to the Hamiltons and took firm measures against Archbishop Hamilton and a large number of priests for saying mass at various parish churches appropriated to the Archbishop's abbey of Paisley and at Maybole in Ayrshire. This represented a clear warning from the queen to the conservatives in the west that they were not to attempt there what Huntly had failed to achieve in the north. In the event the challenge to her authority was not as threatening as Huntly's had been, but her determination to distance herself from the conservatives was manifest in her prosecution of Hamilton and his accomplices. That her ploy succeeded is clear from the satisfied reaction of the English ambassador, but it was equally unpleasing to the

Catholic clergy in the area, many of whom were reported as fleeing across the border into England to escape a wave of repression which they believed to be imminent.¹³¹ Certainly Bishop Gordon, who was perhaps easily cowed, was sufficiently afraid of reprisal to write to Nicholas de Gouda, the papal envoy, refusing to see him because of the present crisis.¹³² The conservative cause was at a very low ebb by the middle of 1563, a situation that had been successfully engineered by the queen in the interests of her claim to the English throne.

In Aberdeen the Protestant minority had every reason to be pleased with events as they then stood. The principal threat to their cause, the earl of Huntly, had been defeated and his stronghold in Old Aberdeen effectively neutralised. The bishop was overawed by the queen's decisiveness and fearful of further moves against him. Even King's College had been warned by the granting of a charter of confirmation that their natural protector was now the queen and not the earl of Huntly, since such protection could easily be removed should the clergy there not continue in good behaviour. The queen was not without allies in Old Aberdeen, but the alliance was constructed on her terms. In the burgh of Aberdeen itself the new kirk had been equipped with a reformed system of congregational government and a system of oversight which offered potential for development as a representative body, but in many ways the burgh was untypical of its hinterland and the rest of the region.

Throughout the 1560s the General Assemblies were to complain of the shortage of ministers especially in the north-east. In June 1564 it was even suggested that the northern parts of the kingdom should receive a visit from John Knox since they were destitute of superintendents or commissioners.¹³³ This pressure to increase the spread of reformed opinion and structures of government may have provoked some strains within

the central ruling group on the council. In October 1564 Thomas Menzies, the provost, whose power had in many ways never been greater, tendered his resignation to the council. This provoked something of a crisis since no warning seems to have been given of his intention. The whole community of the burgh refused to accept his resignation 'for certain reasonable causes moving him' and he was elected once more whereupon he again refused and the session was suspended until the next morning. When the council reconvened Menzies was elected once again and this time he accepted. In the same sitting the council passed a new statute which considerably increased the power of the provost and bailies, who had already concentrated most of the instruments of government in their hands. The statute entitled them to replace any of the town's officers on their own initiative without consulting the community.¹³⁴

The motives behind Menzies' resignation are not obvious and they are not clarified in the council register. In the rapidly changing political climate of the time he may have felt that it was time for him to retire and make way for a younger man. He had first been elected provost of Aberdeen in 1525 and he had served continuously in that office since 1547, so by 1564 Menzies must have been at least 64. However the vote of confidence expressed by the council enabled him to continue in office until 1576, the year before his death.¹³⁵ Once again Menzies emerged from a crisis with his authority augmented and his position at the head of the burgh administration secure. It may have been expensive to maintain the Menzies in power, but their experience of government and their network of political contacts was to prove invaluable in times of crisis. It was to take decades for effective opposition to emerge with anything like the administrative credibility displayed by the Menzies.

In the years following the establishment of the Reformation and

the confirmation of the provost in office in 1564 only vague tremors of political unrest reached Aberdeen from the south. The minor crisis of the Chaseabout Raid in August and September 1565 caused only slight ripples in the burgh. Neither did the queen's marriage and her increasing favour to Catholicism affect burgh life substantially. In the main the town was keen to prove its loyalty to the queen and to abstain from anything resembling military activity. When news of Moray's revolt arrived in the burgh in August the burgesses' first thought was to order the repair of the blockhouse in order to defend the harbour against invasion by the 'auld enemies' of England.¹³⁶ The involvement of the region in national politics was significantly increased in response to the raid, since Mary deliberately restored the earldom of Huntly as a balance to the power wielded by Moray. Mary rapidly freed Lord Gordon, the late earl's son, from prison in Dunbar and her confidence in him was not misplaced since the 'whole force of the north' was soon marching to her assistance.¹³⁷ The defeat of Moray had been preceded by the restoration of the new earl of Huntly to his father's place on the privy council.¹³⁸ It was further clear that with the queen's victory not only would Catholicism be treated with greater favour¹³⁹ but also Aberdeen would once more be in the centre of the political stage since it formed part of the power base of the earl of Huntly whose loyalties to the queen were bound to be a decisive factor in any future civil disturbances.

Although Huntly immediately resumed his father's former position as spokesman for the conservative sympathisers within the country, it is not clear whether he was motivated more by religious concerns or by simple hatred for Moray. Certainly Huntly's increasing favour at court and his hostility to Moray, whom he blamed for his father's downfall, was to be the keynote of north-eastern politics for the next five years. Thomas

Menzies, recently confirmed in office, was faced with the prospect of securing the burgh some independence of action whilst avoiding being crushed by the twin millstones of the proximate power of Huntly and the more distant, but still very real influence of Moray and all that he represented. A constant feature in the midst of all of these considerations was the ever-present threat of English invasion and closure of the sea lanes, a prospect that always terrified the burgesses.

The restoration of Huntly meant a resurgence of Gordon power in the north-east, but it was by no means clear in which direction this power would be exercised. Huntly was the spokesman for the conservative faction but he was by no means committed to Catholicism, although tolerant of it. In February 1566 Huntly had refused to take part in the queen's Candlemas celebrations, although Darnley, Lennox and Atholl were prepared to do so.¹⁴⁰ Similarly in June of the same year Killigrew, the English ambassador, wrote to Cecil describing his attendance at a sermon in St Giles in company with Huntly, Argyll, Mar and Crawford.¹⁴¹ At the same time the clerical influence of Aberdonians was increasing about the queen in that John Leslie, newly provided to the diocese of Ross, was held by Killigrew to be responsible for the queen's affairs of state.¹⁴² The links binding the conservatives were further strengthened by the marriage of Huntly's sister to the earl of Bothwell in February 1566.¹⁴³ The Hepburn family were represented in the north-east by the bishop of Moray, Bothwell's great-uncle, and his castle at Spynie was to prove a useful refuge for Bothwell later in his career.¹⁴⁴ The marriage thus gave the two families an opportunity to express territorial as well as political solidarity.

The events of 1567 and Huntly's prominent part in the queen's cause have left little trace in the burgh records of Aberdeen. There

were few serious attempts to increase the Protestant character of the town. On the whole the support given by the council to the minister and his assistants was minimal and half-hearted. In April 1566 John Leslie, the reader in the parish kirk, had complained that his salary had not been paid for some time past.¹⁴⁵ The council's attitude to its Catholic servants and former Catholic clergy seems to have been more sympathetic. In October 1566 Master John Henderson, the Catholic master of the grammar school, had his salary increased once again,¹⁴⁶ whilst William Walker, a former chaplain of St Nicholas, was granted the office of sacristan in the same kirk.¹⁴⁷ On the whole the town was much more solicitous for the welfare of its former clergy, some of whom retained their Catholic sympathies, than they were about their Protestant replacements who were often unpaid and scantily regarded. The links between Old Aberdeen and the burgh are well-illustrated in the life of John Kennedy. In 1562 he had already been granted a burse in civil law in King's College and in May 1567, just as events in the north were building up to crisis point, the bishop of Aberdeen granted Kennedy a pension of 100 merks a year.¹⁴⁸ In the forthcoming troubles it was prudent of the bishop to have a Gordon pensioner as town clerk of Aberdeen. The Catholic clergy retained their personal links, and indeed the greater the Protestant threat the closer such links became. The influence of the Protestant clergy was small compared with such a network of co-operation and mutual support.

The defeat of the queen at Carberry and her abdication and imprisonment placed the burgh of Aberdeen in an awkward predicament. The earl of Huntly had clearly shown where his loyalties lay and the burghesses had no desire to see the burgh embroiled in resistance to the king's government. In the event they decided to steer a course of non-alignment hoping to placate both parties. The General Assembly of 1567 was a

decidedly militant body determined to achieve the kind of Reformation left unfinished in 1560. Aberdeen prudently decided not to be represented at this assembly, apart from sending its minister Adam Heriot. The fulsome apologies of Thomas Menzies on behalf of the burgh were recorded in the proceedings of the assembly. Once again the burgh was caught between the policies of the earl of Huntly and those of central government, and it did not want to run the risk of antagonising either. Already in June 1563 the General Assembly had ordered that those who did not profess the reformed faith should be removed from teaching in universities.¹⁴⁹ King's College was a glaring example of fidelity to Catholicism and was bound to receive a visit from the Kirk before too long. The burgh authorities believed it better to be absent from the assembly rather than be forced to explain embarrassing lacunae in the town's reformed policy.

In July 1567 the conservative sympathisers received a stern warning from the victorious Moray and his associates of the fate awaiting Catholic centres of resistance to the new regime. In 1567 as in 1562 the principal threats to the new government were the Gordons and the Hamiltons. In July 1567 the Protestant party determined to make an example of Archbishop Hamilton who had been using his powers of patronage and the network of contacts available to him through Paisley Abbey to maintain the Catholic cause. As a result Moray determined to make the abbey a target of his displeasure and end its role as a Catholic resource centre.¹⁵⁰ When the Archbishop became aware of their purpose he changed his attitude and gave assurances of his good behaviour. The lords accordingly halted their march on Paisley and agreed to leave it unharmed.¹⁵¹ The lesson was not lost on Aberdeen; provided the burgh, conservative though it was, did not venture into the field against the lords then its positive

neutrality would be enough to ensure it would be undisturbed, for the time being at least. The council was always prepared to temporise whilst offering strong protestations of loyalty to the central government; after all such protestations cost nothing. This policy was gravely endangered and eventually rendered totally ineffective by the policies of the earl of Huntly who was busy consolidating a regional centre of opposition to the lords, although at the same time during September and October 1567 he was making overtures to the earl of Moray offering to come to terms with him.¹⁵²

In the following months the Menzies family were trapped between the conflicting interests of the earl of Moray and the earl of Huntly with very little room for manoeuvre. By showing a reasonable amount of support for Huntly in the forthcoming crisis the provost may have hoped to avoid an occupation or invasion of the burgh by the Gordons; but the Regent's authority was first felt directly in Old Aberdeen. On 23 January 1568 the provost explained to the council that the lead was to be removed from the roof of St Machar's Cathedral. Although the provost did not encourage anybody to impede the operation he did forbid any of the burgh's inhabitants from co-operating with the scheme under banishment from the town.¹⁵³ The men charged with removing the lead, which was to be sold to help pay for Moray's military expenditure, were two Edinburgh merchants William Birnie and Alexander Clark. Birnie was one of the richest merchants of the sixteenth century,¹⁵⁴ whilst Clark was a confidant of Randolph, the former English ambassador and a client of the earl of Moray.¹⁵⁵ Menzies' objections to the project may have stemmed in large measure from outrage at the prospect of a large part of the ecclesiastical wealth of Aberdeen going south with no hope of any of the profit coming to the burgh.

Even the normally cautious Bishop Gordon objected to the pillaging of his cathedral and registered a strong protest, taking instruments on 5 February 1568. He was joined by all of the local conservative worthies, William Leslie of Balquhain, sheriff-depute of Aberdeen, Thomas Menzies, provost of Aberdeen, Alexander Leslie of Wardres, William Seton of Meldrum, Gilbert Menzies of Coull, bailie of Aberdeen and Martin Howeson, a notary member of the Aberdeen council and former commissary to Bishop Gordon. There are a number of other masters and notaries on the same list which may represent a section of the academic establishment of Old Aberdeen and what remained of the bishop's household.¹⁵⁶ The next day a further protest was registered in the name of James Cheyne of Straloch and eight others, all of whom were masters including the chancellor of the diocese, Alexander Seton, and Alexander Cheyne, the commissary of Aberdeen. The earl of Huntly's name does not appear on either document, but his attitude to the affair may be judged from his later frustration of attempts to sell the lead off Elgin cathedral.¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless the list of names provides evidence of the strength of feeling against the earl of Moray as well as some aspects at least of the Reformation, as well as offering a roll call of those who were to be the most prominent local supporters of the earl of Huntly amongst the lairds in the vicinity of Aberdeen.

Amongst the opponents of the unroofing of the cathedral most were to remain committed to Catholicism and support of Huntly during the following years. Leslie of Balquhain had been a prominent defender of Catholic institutions within the burgh of Aberdeen in 1560. On the same occasion he had joined with the fourth earl of Huntly in repelling attacks on St Machar's cathedral.¹⁵⁸ During her northern progress in 1562 Queen Mary had spent a night at Balquhain castle where mass was

celebrated in the chapel of Garioch.¹⁵⁹ Bishop Gordon had himself recognised Leslie's contribution to the Catholic cause by granting him a feu charter of the episcopal country seat at Fetternear.¹⁶⁰ In the latter part of the civil war Leslie was to transfer his allegiance to the King's party, but in the earlier part of the conflict his loyalties lay with the conservative cause.¹⁶¹ Seton of Meldrum was a strong supporter of the Catholic party as was his brother the chancellor of Aberdeen, Alexander Seton, who signed the second protest and whose house in Old Aberdeen was a well-known mass centre and focus of disaffection.¹⁶² Another signatory of the second protest along with Alexander Seton was Cheyne of Straloch whose family had been one of the few local landed families to support the fourth earl of Huntly at Corrichie in 1562.¹⁶³ Finally the representatives of the burgh, Thomas and Gilbert Menzies, were well known opponents of the Reformation settlement although they were not to be challenged on this point until the earl of Morton succeeded in crushing Aberdeen at the end of the civil war in 1574. Despite their objections the conservatives were defeated on the matter of the cathedral lead. The roof was removed and loaded on to a ship in Aberdeen harbour before being transported for sale in Holland. Unfortunately the vessel proved to be overloaded and sank about half a mile off shore with the loss of her entire cargo of plunder.¹⁶⁴ The disaster may have given the lairds and burgesses some wry satisfaction but the whole episode reminded them of their vulnerability to the intentions of the earl of Moray. They had declared their opposition but they had failed to prevent the spoilation taking place. In many ways they were facing the worst of all possible worlds, having shown their hands and not been strong enough to enforce their will.

The failure to prevent the removal of the lead from St Machar's

may have partly conditioned the acquiescence with which the next shot in the Regent's campaign in the north was met. Undoubtedly Mary's captivity and Moray's regency encouraged the General Assembly to proceed further against the next target of their reforming zeal, King's College. In July 1568 the assembly had petitioned the regent for a purge of King's College.¹⁶⁵ Moray did not need much encouragement on this score since the project was plainly in sympathy with his own views. Already in July Master John Gordon, the illegitimate son of Bishop Gordon of Galloway and afterwards Dean of Salisbury,¹⁶⁶ had written to Moray referring to a conversation they had enjoyed a year previously. Moray had then described his intentions of reforming the universities and Gordon now remarked that since he was now in a position to implement that intention he should press ahead. Moreover Moray's old teacher, Ramus, had expressed his good wishes and expressed a hope that he could one day come to Scotland.¹⁶⁷ John Gordon was a kinsman of the earl of Huntly, and the earl of Moray's intentions would not be long reaching the Chanonry in Old Aberdeen. The Aberdeen doctors would certainly not have relished the prospect of their university becoming a centre of godly Calvinism and, possibly, worse still, anti-Aristotelianism.

The good intentions of the General Assembly and the earl of Moray were slow to be realised in Old Aberdeen since King's College continued undisturbed until June 1569 when it was purged by Erskine of Dun and his companions acting on the mandate of the General Assembly and with the benefit of the Regent's presence in the town.¹⁶⁸ The intervening obstacle between intention and execution was the earl of Huntly and the disturbed state of the realm.

King's College was the last bastion of Catholic academics in the Country and, since it was the last, it was also the most important to the

conservative cause. The moves against the college represent Moray's determination to make his power felt in the heart of Gordon territory. Although King's College was only one stone in the local political structure, it was exceedingly well-placed right in the heart of the Gordon stronghold of Old Aberdeen. Had not hostilities erupted between Moray and the queen's lords then King's would have been purged much earlier.

The reaction to the threat to northern freedom of action came quite strongly in July 1568. It was reported to Cecil that Huntly and Argyll were ready to come out in favour of the queen and that they intended 'to destroy as many burghs as have assisted the Regent with men or money'.¹⁶⁹ In August there were further reports of Dundee and Perth being afraid of assault by the earl of Huntly and his forces.¹⁷⁰ The threat was serious since it had been estimated that Huntly was able to put 1,000 well armed men in the field.¹⁷¹ The threat from the queen's party was so strong that Moray wrote in August that he dared not postpone the forthcoming parliament in case he lost credibility with his supporters.¹⁷² The list of endangered burghs must also have included Aberdeen, which suggests that the burgh's co-operation with Huntly during the civil war was wrung from it reluctantly.

In September 1568 Moray wrote to Elizabeth listing the various enormities committed by Huntly, and amongst these there is a reference to an attack on the burgh of Aberdeen. At some time in August Huntly had besieged the provost's house and forced the town to yield to him.¹⁷³ One of the principals involved in the attack on Menzies' house was John Leslie, a member of the same family Menzies had earlier allied with to save the cathedral roof,¹⁷⁴ which in itself illustrates the shifting pattern of alliances in the north-east in times of stress. The attack was a considerable military operation since Huntly was accompanied by 1500

men with whom he 'threatened extermination against the provost ... ane antient and worshipfull man'.¹⁷⁵ Aberdeen and its leading family were not totally compliant in Huntly's rebellion and had to be coerced into association with him. The burgh itself was of two-fold significance to the earl: it was the capital of a geographically well-defined region and an ideal centre for administration. It was too dangerous a threat to Huntly's rear should its loyalty be undermined and he be involved in any military activity in the south of the country. It is significant that once the burgh was secure in Gordon hands Huntly mounted an attack across the Mounth with 400 or 500 men although another estimate placed his strength at 700 horse.¹⁷⁶ Such an enterprise would have been impossible had Aberdeen not been under his control.

By August 1568 Huntly dominated Aberdeen with a garrison there, which was quite probably under the command of his brother Adam who seems often to have acted as Huntly's deputy in the region. The situation within the burgh was more than a little tense since reference is made to it in the normally discreet council registers. A certain Robert Patterson, a tailor, was charged with slandering Master George Johnston, the provost's son-in-law and one of the leading councillors, by reporting that he had spoken against the earl of Huntly. During August a stent was levied on the town by the council in support of the earl.¹⁷⁷ Two weeks after the stent was ordered two inhabitants of the burgh were convicted of slandering and defaming the stentmasters, especially Master Thomas Fynne.¹⁷⁸ One of the accused, Duncan Donaldson, paid thirty shillings contribution to the repair of St Nicholas in 1576, only ten shillings less than the provost, and was therefore a man of some substance. There was certainly some resistance to the occupation of the town and it did come from more than one section of the burgh. Such opposition was

not recorded in the council registers even if it was voiced in the council chamber. The councillors saw it as their responsibility to shield the burgh from the worst effects of Huntly's presence through a limited policy of co-operation. In effect they pursued the same policy with Huntly as they had done earlier with the earl of Moray and as they were to do in the 1570s with the earl of Morton.

In February 1569 the burgh was called upon to raise yet another stent to support sixty soldiers under Huntly's command. Once again resentment was caused in the burgh amongst those who realised that a debt would have to be paid should the king's party emerge victorious. The council was so fearful of vocal opposition that a special statute was passed forbidding the slandering of the stentmasters appointed by the burgh. Once again Master Thomas Fynne was the particular object of the critics' displeasure. Coincidentally Fynne was married to the daughter of one of Edinburgh's most prominent Marians, Archibald Seinyour.¹⁷⁹ Offenders against the new statute were to ask his forgiveness publicly and then pay £10 Scots for the first offence and be discharged of the freedom of the burgh for the second.

During this period Huntly's power was unchecked throughout the north and Aberdeen was powerless to oppose him. By September the queen had recognised him as her lieutenant in the north.¹⁸⁰ The burghs had good reason to fear his appointment and to suspect that he would pay scant regard to their rights. He was not above interfering directly in the affairs of the burghs that had fallen under his control. In January 1569 Queen Mary wrote to him asking that he should not depose the provost of Elgin from his office but to allow him to continue.¹⁸¹

Huntly's submission to Moray in May 1569 altered the political equilibrium in the north once again and closed the first period of hosti-

lities. It allowed Moray the opening that he needed in the north-east. Immediately the Regent set about consolidating the pacification of the region.¹⁸² On 16 May the council of Aberdeen ordered the town's treasurer, John Lawson, to prepare a propine for the Regent. By the standards of previous gifts, it was meagre: a tun of wine and three chalders of coal for Moray's lodging in the burgh.¹⁸³ The size of the gift suggests that either the town was displeased at his arrival or that there was very little to spare in terms of cash held in the common good.

The Regent was not overly discouraged by his cool welcome to Aberdeen and despite it managed to accomplish the long-expected purge of King's College.¹⁸⁴ By the beginning of July he had obtained the complete submission of Huntly and was able to report to Elizabeth that none of the great 'masse of the north, or at least very few of them, were disobedient to his authority'.¹⁸⁵ The cost of the rebellion to Huntly was considerable; according to Leslie he was forced to pay such 'compositions as never were taken before'. Moray also took the opportunity to eject Leslie's own servants from their occupancy of the chanonry of Ross, extinguishing one of the last ecclesiastical refuges of the region.¹⁸⁶

The treatment meted out to the burgh was much gentler than Huntly's had been. On 8 August 1569 Thomas Menzies showed to the council a letter of discharge from the Regent which accepted that any assistance furnished to the earl of Huntly by the burgh had been wrung from it through fear and compulsion. They were discharged for ever from any action that might be raised against them in this regard.¹⁸⁷ It was to be to Moray's advantage to be understanding and conciliatory towards Aberdeen; a more rigorous policy might have driven the burgesses closer to Huntly. With Aberdeen as a potential enemy at his back, Huntly would be driven to divide his forces to secure the burgh and its port. The wisdom of the

Regent's policy was to become apparent after his death during the second phase of the civil war when Huntly had to spend considerable sums of men and resources in securing the burgh of Aberdeen for the king's party.

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2. J. M. Brown, 'The Exercise of Power', in Scottish Society in the Fifteenth Century, ed. J.M. Brown (London, 1977), pp. 38-9.
3. Council Register of Aberdeen, i, p. 356.
4. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxiv, fo. 13.
5. Council Register of Aberdeen, i, p. 326.
6. Council Register of Aberdeen, pp. 315-6.
7. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxiv, fo. 85.
8. Knox, History, i, pp. 353-4; Keith, History, iii, pp. 31-2.
9. G.D. Henderson, The Founding of Marischal College, Aberdeen (Aberdeen, 1947), p. 51; W. Orem, A Description of the Chanonry, Cathedral, and King's College, of Old Aberdeen, in the years 1724-5 (Aberdeen, 1832), p. 70.
10. Orem, A Description of the Chanonry, pp. 54, 74.
11. The First Book of Discipline, ed. J.K. Cameron (Edinburgh, 1972), p. 12.
12. Leslie, History (Bannatyne), p. 293.
13. Leslie, History (Bannatyne), p. 294.
14. See above p. 27.
15. Knox, History, i, p. 361.
16. Brown, 'The Exercise of Power', p. 52.
17. Spalding Misc., iv, pp. 203-04.
18. Although Sir Alexander Seton was incorporated into the Gordon family through his mother. He subsequently became first earl of Huntly. Scots Peerage, iv, p. 521.
19. A. Grant, Independence and Nationhood: Scotland 1306-1469 (London, 1984), p. 136.
20. RMS, i, 2909.
21. Spalding Misc., iv, pp. 207, 210, 205, 217-9, 214-5, 223.
22. Spalding Misc., iv, p. 224.
23. Wormald, Court, Kirk, and Community, p. 32.
24. SRO, GD 44/15/3/1.
25. Records of Aboyne, 1230-1681 (New Spalding Club, 1894), p.455.
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27. Gavin Douglas, The Pállice of Honour, in The Poetical Works of Gavin Douglas (Edinburgh, 1874), i, p. 72.
28. CSP Scot., i, no. 1136.
29. M.E. James, 'Obedeince and Dissent in Henrician England: The Lincolnshire Rebellion, 1536', Past and Present, no. 48 (1970) p. 44.
30. Records of Aboyne, p. 467.
31. Knox, History, i, pp. 314-6.
32. CSP Scot., i, no. 838.
33. Knox, History, i, p. 309.
34. CSP Foreign Eliz., 1560-61, no. 501.
35. CSP Scot., ii, no. 31.
36. St Andrews. Register of the Ministers, Elders and Deacons of St Andrews, 1559-1600, ed. D.H. Fleming (SHS, 1889-90), i, p. 3.
37. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxiv, fos. 10, 307-08, 533.
38. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxiv, fo. 22.
39. CSP Scot., i, no. 885.
40. See above p. 27.
41. G. Donaldson, All The Queen's Men: Power and Politics in Mary Stewart's Scotland (London, 1983), p. 35.

42. See above p. 34.
43. Knox, History, i, p. 347.
44. CSP Foreign Eliz., 1561-62, no. 125.
45. CSP Foreign Eliz., 1561-62, no. 211.
46. CSP Scot., i, no. 1011.
47. W. Ferguson, Scotland's Relations with England, p. 84.
48. RPC, i, p. 157.
49. CSP Foreign Eliz., 1561-62, no. 590.
50. CSP Spanish Eliz., 1558-67, no. 143.
51. CSP Foreign Eliz., 1561-62, nos. 621, 653.
52. CSP Spanish Eliz., 1558-67, no. 147.
53. CSP Foreign Eliz., 1561-62, no. 747.
54. Records of Aboyne, p. 460.
55. Council Register of Aberdeen, i, pp. 339-40.
56. Scottish Notes and Queries, vii, pp. 178-80, 178.
57. Fleming, The Reformation in Scotland, pp. 320-1.
58. Council Register of Aberdeen, i, p. 317.
59. Council Register of Aberdeen, i, pp. 316, 319.
60. Council Register of Aberdeen, i, p. 323.
61. Council Register of Aberdeen, i, p. 319.
62. Kirk Session Register of Aberdeen, p. 3.
63. Alexander Knowles was married to Elizabeth Gordon. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxviii, fo. 418; Fleming, The Reformation in Scotland, p. 55; Kennedy, Annals of Aberdeen, ii, p. 314.
64. Ms. Aberdeen Register of Sasines, xii, 27 March 1565 for John Lowson and Elizabeth Menzies his wife, daughter of Thomas Menzies of Pitfoddels.
65. Records of Aboyne, p. 467.
66. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxiv, fo. 339.
67. ibid., fo. 339.
68. ibid., fo. 339.
69. ibid., fo. 339.
70. Donaldson, All The Queen's Men, p. 51.
71. CSP Foreign Eliz., 1561-62, no. 883.
72. Knox, History, ii, pp. 32-3.
73. Illustrations of the topography and antiquities of the shires of Aberdeen and Banff (Spalding Club, 1869), iv, p. 743.
74. Scottish Notes and Queries, vii, p. 339.
75. RPC, i, p. 204. The last recorded presence of Huntly at the council.
76. CSP Foreign Eliz., 1562, no. 170.
77. CSP Scot., i, no. 1127.
78. CSP Scot., i, nos. 1120, 1127.
79. Knox, History, i, p. 54.
80. Knox, History, i, p. 55.
81. CSP Foreign Eliz., 1562, no. 554.
82. BUK, i, p. 48.
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CHAPTER SIX

Aberdeen and the Civil War.

The nomination of the earl of Lennox as regent in May 1570 imposed additional strain on the already battered sense of national community, as well as challenging the integrity of the various local communities which composed it. Lennox's exile in England had been of sufficient duration for him to lose familiarity with the conventions of Scottish government and respect for the personal and institutional elements in its constitution. He showed himself to be far from conciliatory, and his exercise of power was firm to the point of brutality. Action was taken, with English support, not only against the Queen's Party but also against those who had earlier stood against the regent's family interest and been implicated in the murder of his son. Thus national politics came almost to be dominated by local considerations. Lennox's dependence on English support threatened both national and class solidarity and was the principal reason advanced by the Queen's Party against his suitability as regent. Huntly, the most prominent Marian in the kingdom, declared that the regent's association with England was prejudicial to the freedom of Scotland and that he was unable for 'sic ane office quha made faith to ane foraine prince'.¹ By the end of May Huntly had turned his words into deeds and was in the field with 1,000 men at his command.²

In many ways the conflicts of the 1540s were being re-lived in the 1570s with many of the principal actors of the earlier period adopting similar ideological positions in the later. Lennox had shown himself consistently pro-English since the death of James V. His anglophile sympathies, together with his determination not to take counsel from such who were 'wys and substantial', undermined the community of the nobility and challenged the assurance of those who regarded themselves as the politically responsible in the kingdom.

It was this consideration as much as any other which prompted the earl of Huntly to proceed against Lennox. The question at issue was not simply that of legitimate authority, but one of the status of territorial power blocs. Whereas successive earls of Huntly had shown themselves willing to compromise on many issues, even that of religion, they seldom resisted a challenge to their pre-eminent authority in the north-east. Lennox's actions against Argyll and the Hamiltons were a clear demonstration of the line he intended to pursue against the magnates, and Huntly was determined to oppose it.³ The subsequent course of the civil war cut across the established loyalties and patterns of authority on which local and national government was based. In the ensuing conflict the distinctness of the various components of local society became more pronounced, and even confessional controversy, though an added complication, was often a subordinate consideration in the formation of alliances. Thus it was possible for the burgh of Aberdeen with its distinctive conservative sympathies to try and remain aloof from the schemes of the firmly conservative and Marian earl of Huntly. However, his actions against the earl of Lennox had direct consequences for the burgh which found itself once more threatened by attack and occupation.

On two occasions in the recent past, during the crisis of 1543-1545 and that of 1562, Aberdeen had faced a conflict of local and national loyalties. Throughout both emergencies the burgh had striven to maintain its freedom and independence by avoiding wholesale absorption into the local web of authority of the earl of Huntly. The unrivalled power of the earl in the north placed Aberdeen at a distinct disadvantage; it limited the political options of the burgh quite considerably. Edinburgh was able to achieve a measure of independence

from magnatial families since the burgh's provostship was the object of aristocratic cupidity on several occasions during the sixteenth century.⁴ Aberdeen did not have the same choice of potential allies or the scope for manipulation of faction amongst the local aristocracy. Its recent identity as a coherent, well-regulated community bound by common rules and sharing a common purpose, had evolved in counterpoise to the disproportionate local power of the earl of Huntly. What underlay their occasional disagreements was not simply a conflict of interest but a different application of the ideal of freedom. Close involvement of the burgh in the affairs of the earl of Huntly would undermine not only its own autonomy but its entire relationship to central government, on which its freedom rested. Aberdeen's freedom involved a measure of dependence on, and protection from, the superior power of the crown. The burgesses of Aberdeen were deeply conscious of their rights and privileges as tenants-in-chief of the crown. Their absorption into the sphere of influence of the earl of Huntly, another tenant-in-chief of the crown, would seriously inhibit their freedom and seriously disturb the balance of forces within the realm. The burgh's answer to this dilemma was to stress its allegiance to the crown, the source of its liberties. Since the deposition of Queen Mary the burgh had made clear that its loyalty lay with the king, and not with his mother and her agent the earl of Huntly. In June 1569 the town had given graphic indication of where its loyalties lay by ordering that the king's arms be carved on the facade of the tolbooth.⁵ Their action demonstrated their conviction that the acceptance of the lordship of anybody other than the sovereign would effectively ensure the dissolution of the community of free men, which was how the burgesses of Aberdeen saw themselves.⁶

The incidental effect of the occasional friction between the earl of Huntly and the burgh of Aberdeen had been an increase of self-assurance on the part of the burgh community. The burgesses were more aware of their distinct role in the local polity, and were consequently more intent on stressing it. Paradoxically the more distinct the burgh appeared, and the less dependent it was on the shifting emphases of magnatial politics, the more important it was for the earl of Huntly to control it. The significance of Aberdeen for Huntly was strategic, economic and symbolic. The nodality of the burgh, its safe haven and its direct and unmediated access to the east coast of Scotland as well as the littoral of mainland Europe, were both benefits and potential threats. Huntly could not afford to leave an unsympathetic and potentially dangerous enemy at his back whilst he was involved in military adventures in the south. From April 1571, when the focus of the civil war shifted to Edinburgh, it was all the more important to Huntly to ensure that he could not be attacked in his rear and that Aberdeen would not be the focus of an invasion from the south by the King's Party alone, or in consort with their English allies.⁷

The strategic importance of Aberdeen as an entry-point for supplies and encouragement from foreign allies was not lost on the earl and his agents. Aberdeen was used consistently as a link in the chain of communications between the Queen's Party and the continent throughout hostilities. In July 1570 Huntly boasted that he had received a papal subsidy of 20,000 crowns from Flanders,⁸ and in February 1571 Aberdeen was the port of entry for a Spanish subsidy from Flanders directed to Kirkcaldy of Grange.⁹ Despite his objections to Lennox's foreign connections Huntly did not hesitate to make

the best of the opportunities offered by the port of Aberdeen to engage in the illicit carriage of men and money to and from the continent. Soon after Huntly gained control of the burgh in July 1570 reports reached England that ships bound for Scotland were being prepared in the Netherlands;¹⁰ in August rumours spread that the duke of Alva intended to land in Scotland.¹¹ Two mysterious foreigners, suspected of being Alva's agents, appeared soon afterwards in Aberdeen and attempted to make contact with the earl of Huntly. Their arrival substantially increased the fears of an imminent invasion.¹² In September 1570 the prospect of foreign troops attempting a landing in the north-east appeared likely enough for the earl of Huntly to order the sounding of all the potential landing places along the Aberdeenshire coast.¹³ The rumours were convincing enough to alarm Lennox who passed them on to Elizabeth in London.¹⁴ The rumours of invasion were probably more wishful thinking than anything else. However, such stories were useful in applying psychological pressure on the regent and the King's Party. The control of a port was an undoubted strategic advantage which Huntly could not afford to miss.

Aberdeen's role as a provincial capital and recognised administrative centre was another factor weighing with Huntly in his determination to gain possession of it. As the queen's lieutenant in the north he needed a suitable centre in which to install his vice-regal government. A display of the pomp and circumstance of authority was an important means of rendering that authority effective. The evidence suggests that Huntly did maintain a viable and credible administration in Aberdeen throughout his occupation of the town. One of the charges levelled against him by his opponents concerned his holding of courts and his exercise of the prerogative of justice.

Queen Mary had shown herself much more conscious of the workings of the Scottish polity during her imprisonment in England than she had whilst she actually ruled in Edinburgh. In exile in England she was happy to return to the former dependence of the crown on the earls of Huntly in the north. Their influence had traditionally rested on royal favour and commissions of lieutenancy in the region.¹⁵ During the civil war Huntly took his position extremely seriously. He equipped himself with the administrative structure suited to his status, including by June 1570 a privy council which probably comprised the earls of Atholl and Crawford, and the commendator of Arbroath with lord Ogilvy.¹⁶ There is evidence that the queen's lieutenants did operate a judicial system within the bounds of their jurisdiction. Huntly's court was established at Aberdeen where it received appeals from the outlying areas of the region.¹⁷ In order to service such a system the earl needed a corps of trained and sympathetic lawyers. He also needed a staff of clerks with sufficient expertise to frame the proclamations issued by the lieutenant, and to conduct the business of the vice-regal court. Only Aberdeen could provide such resources, boasting, as it did on its doorstep, the conservative colony of Old Aberdeen with its ecclesiastical and academic personnel. Aberdeen was therefore able to offer necessary services to Huntly which could only be requested and not coerced. His need for such services conditioned his relationship with the burgh, which was of a different order to that he enjoyed with other burghs loyal to the king.

Huntly's influence and credibility as lieutenant in the north depended not only on his military strength but also on his ability to provide justice in the areas under his control. The one document to survive from one of his courts during this period shows that he

was doing justice in quite small cases.¹⁸ His jurisdiction was widely recognised throughout the north-east and his courts at Aberdeen were often more attractive to litigants than the king's courts. The alarm of the earl of Lennox at Huntly's judicial activity underlines its effectiveness.¹⁹ However, the exercise of justice could prove expensive. The enforcement of judgements and the collection of fines took money as well as time, since the officers of the courts and those responsible for executing its judgements demanded payment. The officials charged with uplifting the compositions levied by the earl of Moray during his visit to the north-east in 1569 took over 184 days to gather in only part of the amount due. Andrew Annand, together with a boy and his horse, cost the government ninety two pounds between August 1569 and February 1570 for their work in collecting fines.²⁰ The courts were absolutely essential to Huntly if his jurisdiction and commission as lieutenant were to be taken seriously in the north-east, but they demanded considerable resources to remain effective. It was the sovereign's duty to make justice available to his subjects, therefore it was the sovereign's lieutenant's duty to do the same. The execution of effective justice raised a second problem for Huntly, the problem of finance.

The geographical area of Huntly's authority was considerable and offered many potentially valuable resources of men and money. His greatest deficiency was to prove not so much to be men but in money to pay them. His previous rebellion against the earl of Moray had involved a vast outlay of capital which meant that his reserves were already low when he took the field against the earl of Lennox. By the middle of 1570 he was driven to raise loans against his estates, and

by July of that year the mortgages he had raised were alleged to amount to £5,000.²¹ The extensive administrative machinery which ensured adequate policing and protection throughout his lieutenantry was expensive to maintain. His supporters and agents could be involved in military activity all over the north-east. One of his principal allies, John Leslie of Parkhill, had carried out operations on the earl's behalf in 1568 which took him from the siege and capture of Dingwall castle to an attack on the house of the provost of Aberdeen.²² Throughout the civil war Huntly was to mount many punitive expeditions against castles and burghs, all of which demanded considerable reserves. At the outset of the conflict he was alleged to have been levying troops wherever he could.²³ His efforts must have achieved some success since in August 1570 he was able to launch an assault on Brechin with 400 arquebusiers,²⁴ whilst during a raid on Angus he was accompanied by 800 men.²⁵ Even towards the end of the war when supplies of men and money were running low Adam Gordon of Auchindoun was able to mount an attack on Brechin with a force of 1600 troops.²⁶

A comparison of Huntly's expenditure on hired troops, supplies and equipment with that of the King's Party gives some idea of the scale of Huntly's operations during these years. In October 1573 Morton was paying out £1,075 to captain David Home and his company of 200 footmen for a month's service; twenty-four light-horsemen with their officers came slightly more expensive at £386 for a month's duty. Even 100 footmen for December 1572 did not seem cheap at £584. Moreover, military expenditure allied to the costs of civil administration regularly outran income. The regent was giving forty shillings a day to Master Thomas Bannatyne, justice depute, for doing his

duty in November 1573.²⁷ The earl of Huntly would have been faced with similar financial demands in the north-east, but he had fewer satisfactory means of fulfilling them. In the end what supported his administration was the ability to protect, intimidate and supply patronage and reward. Lineage, kinship and prestige counted for much, but when combined with insolvency they were unrealisable assets.

During previous times of financial hardship the earl of Huntly had adopted the traditional expedient of turning to the kirk to help him out of his difficulties. It has been pointed out that in a decentralised state such as Scotland was, aristocratic commitment was essential to the establishment of a reformed Church in the localities.²⁸ Lack of commitment, or even downright hostility, on the part of the nobles could set the cause of reformation back for decades. How vulnerable the Kirk was, and how desperate Huntly was for money, can be seen from his exploitation of the thirds of benefices. Whilst successive earls of Huntly had served as lieutenants in the north, and developed the machinery of levying troops and summoning musters, collection of revenue was a different and difficult matter. However, at least in the matter of collecting the thirds Huntly might have been able to rely on a predominantly conservative clergy more willing to subscribe to the queen's cause than the king's government. Huntly's continual interference with kirk revenues had been a regular source of annoyance to successive General Assemblies. In February 1568 the Kirk petitioned the regent to proceed against the earl of Huntly for removing the collectors of the Kirk within the bounds of his lordship. His fault was compounded by his semblance of Protestantism.²⁹ In March the Assembly, somewhat

optimistically commissioned Erskine of Dun, Masters George Hay, Robert Pont and Adam Heriot, to require Huntly to restore the collectors to their proper functions. In the event of his refusal they were to order him to appear before them and to threaten him with excommunication.³⁰ Judging by previous evidence of Hay's conspicuous failure as commissioner for Aberdeen and Heriot's lack of firmness as minister there, this commission simply did not carry enough weight to confront the strongest man in the north-east, and one of the most powerful men in the kingdom. Without more positive support from the regent there was little that the Assembly could do to prevent Huntly from doing what he wished with the revenues. The Kirk, like the central government, suffered from acute institutional underdevelopment, depending, like the royal government, on co-operation in the localities with the natural leaders of regional society. Huntly is a prime example of what damage such non-co-operation could do.

In fact it was a comparatively simple matter for Huntly to divert the ecclesiastical revenues into his own treasury. Collection could easily be hindered by the opposition of the local magnate. The thirds of benefices formed a new levy with no tradition of administration or oversight behind it. Moreover, the revenues to be taxed were fairly easy to estimate and locate. In 1567 Huntly simply intruded Master John Duff, his own collector, into Aberdeen and Banff and he began to collect the thirds. The records show that of the sum collected £211 3/-10d. went to the ministers whilst £954 18/-7½d. was intromitted with by the earl of Huntly.³¹ In the subsequent settlement reached with the earl of Moray the regent declined to put too much pressure on Huntly. After Huntly's submission the

thirds were to be sacrificed to the cause of reconciliation.³²

There was little the Assembly could do in response, caught as it was between the interests of central and local power, save concede whilst asking that the poor ministers be supported somehow.³³ In effect the relationship between Moray and Huntly was to parallel that between Huntly and Aberdeen: it was important for the apparently victorious party to secure loyalty, but not at the price of total subservience which might lead to future conflict. Just as Huntly's local resources could be useful to Moray if appropriately channelled, so could Aberdeen's resources be useful to Huntly if respected and not pillaged.

After the death of the regent Moray the thirds once again proved easy prey to Huntly's agents. The General Assembly renewed its protests about the oppression visited on the kirks in the north by the earl. The official collector in the sheriffdoms of Aberdeen and Banff was unable to secure any payment at all. His successor, John Calder of Asloan, was no more effective since there is a considerable list of unpaid thirds for Aberdeen for the years 1570-1571.³⁴ By 1573 the procurators of the Kirk were demanding payment of the unpaid thirds of the northern benefices for the period 1569-1572 which had allegedly been collected by Huntly's servants. The earl replied to these demands that the revenues had all been spent on men of war 'throw occasioun and necesitie of the troublous tyme'.³⁵ When the case was referred to the regent he found that Huntly's interference with the thirds was covered by the Pacification of Perth, and that the process should be suspended. Once again a sense of political expediency and reality weighed more heavily with central government than religious conviction. The regent was hampered by the same

difficulties successive governments had faced with regard to the north-east. The earl of Huntly was, to all intents and purposes, the effective government in the north; central government had to accept the realities of local power. It could take as long to dismantle such a network of power as it had to construct it in the first place. Even a rebellious or recalcitrant earl of Huntly was a necessary instrument of government.

Powerful though he was in the north the earl of Huntly could not allow the burghs within his lieutenancy to pursue their own political fortunes. The burghs, with their concentration of capital and their international trading connections, represented an indispensable adjunct to government as well as being important sources of revenue. The earl of Morton was fortunate in having the wealth of the merchants of Edinburgh at his disposal. He took full advantage of the opportunities such control offered him and when he experienced difficulties in paying his own soldiers he turned to the expedient of raising forced loans from the wealthier merchants of Edinburgh.³⁶ Although Huntly controlled a number of burghs in the north-east none of them was as wealthy as Edinburgh. However, measures were taken against some of the less important towns to raise revenue to fight the queen's cause. In July 1572 Adam Gordon financed his expedition against Brechin by demanding an indemnity of £2,000 and two tuns of wine from Arbroath, which supported the King's Party. He later tried the same tactic against Forfar with some success.³⁷ The earl of Huntly treated Aberdeen with more consideration and was less brutally direct in making demands for men and money. In Aberdeen he recognised that he was dealing with a disaffected burgh which would not respond well to pressure on its resources. Any financial benefits

wrung from the town might prove excessively difficult to secure, and the costs of collection might well outweigh the effort involved. On the whole Aberdeen seems to have been treated fairly lightly by Huntly; he is recorded as levying only one stent on the town after the death of the regent Moray. In October 1572 the town paid out 600 merks to secure the removal of the earl's troops from the burgh, a small price to pay compared to the treatment meted out to Arbroath.³⁸ Aberdeen was a valuable asset to the queen's cause and Huntly could not take the risk of alienating the burgh. The burgesses were certainly not pliant tools in the earl's hands and, though they might not have been strong enough to resist him by force of arms, they were valuable enough to be treated with respect and a measure of equality.

Aberdeen's initial reaction to Huntly's moves against the regent Lennox gives the lie to the alleged reliance of the burgh on the Gordon interest. In many ways this reaction seems to have come as something of a surprise to the earl himself. Huntly had assumed that he would be able to count on the loyalty, or at least the acquiescence, of the burgesses to his use of their town as his provincial capital. In June 1570 the earl and his council in the north issued a proclamation from Aberdeen ordering a muster of all able-bodied men to assemble in the town adequately provisioned for twenty days.³⁹ He had counted without the stubborn resistance of the burgesses of Aberdeen. When Huntly attempted to convene his council, consisting of the earls of Argyll and Atholl, together with lords Seton, Ogilvy and Maitland of Lethington, he was refused entry to the town and the council was forced to withdraw to Strathbogie.⁴⁰ This was plainly a calculated move on the part of the

town council since they made sure that news of their resistance reached the regent.⁴¹ The town council of Aberdeen was certainly 'a touchy and tight-knit group' who expected the earl of Huntly to be careful of their sensitivities,⁴² but they were also politically acute enough to realise that they stood to lose far more than they would gain from an unqualified victory by the Queen's Party. With the earl of Huntly as the all-powerful agent of an absent queen the burgh would be in a worse state than they were as an occupied town. Their relationship with the crown was the only thing coming between them and the status of a permanent Gordon fief, effectively a burgh of barony. Their loyalty to the King's Party was motivated by pure self-interest arising from a determination to distance themselves from Gordon hegemony and preserve their freedom. For this reason they were intent to show to the regent that any support they offered to Huntly was coerced and not freely given. It was in the interests of the burgh to bolster up royal authority in order to preserve its own integrity; for its part central government was only too happy to recruit such powerful allies in the localities.⁴³

One of the chief dangers resulting from an occupation of the burgh by Huntly, and a danger to which the burgesses always showed themselves sensitive, was that Aberdeen would become the focus of national politics and, above all, English hostility. Again the spectres of the 1540s and the savage raids along the east coast of Scotland could not have been far from the minds of the merchants of Aberdeen, all of whom had a lot to lose. The burgesses had no desire to attract the attention of central government as the rebel capital. Such a reputation might lead to the destruction of their own particular brand of conservatism. In this regard one of the

factors weighing with the council of Aberdeen was Huntly's clear association with the leaders of the recent northern rising against Elizabeth I. English goodwill and free sea-lanes for the lucrative trade with the Low Countries were of the utmost importance to the merchants of Aberdeen. The Gordon association with Elizabeth's troublesome northern earls, themselves representatives of a conservative province conditioned by ties of kinship and lineage, made the burgesses of Aberdeen extremely fearful of possible reprisals from the south. The prominent English rebels, sensing a kindred spirit, had fled to the earl of Huntly where they had received a warm welcome. When the time came for them to travel on to the continent the burgesses of Aberdeen were given the opportunity to demonstrate at once their independence of the earl of Huntly and his reliance on the services they could provide. The merchants of the burgh refused to allow the prominent English exiles, including the earl of Westmoreland, lady Northumberland, and Richard Norton, the sheriff of Yorkshire who had carried the banner of the Five Wounds during the rising, to embark in any of their ships from Aberdeen.⁴⁴ It was July before the English party managed to make their escape, and then only because the burgh was under the control of the earl of Huntly.⁴⁵ This episode clearly demonstrates the strengths and weaknesses of Aberdeen's geographical location. The foundation of the burgh's economic success threatened to work against it by exposing it to invasion from the land in the shape of the chief representative of local landed society, and from the sea in the form of hostile English action.

The difficult relationship between the earl of Huntly and the burgh of Aberdeen was nevertheless marked by considerable tact on

both sides. The earl did not underestimate the degree of opposition to him and did not increase it by burdening the burgesses with oppressive stents or heavy restrictions on their liberties and privileges. Despite his chronic shortage of money, only one stent is recorded as having been levied in his favour during his occupation of the town.⁴⁶ By this time, October 1572, the Queen's Party was already fragmenting and the burgesses were only too happy to reach an agreement for the earl's withdrawal so that they could begin to mend their fences with central government. Throughout the preceding months Huntly, or rather his kinsman and agent in the region, Adam Gordon, refrained from interfering directly in the internal government of the burgh. Whereas the earl had been tempted in previous times to remove the provost of Elgin,⁴⁷ he made no attempt to depose Thomas Menzies or to intrude his own candidates onto the council; elections proceeded as normal with few changes in burgh government. Huntly had an acute sense of the political realities prevailing in the burgh; he realised that burgh government would continue to the profit of both parties if its executive was respected. His conduct in Aberdeen during these years was a model of good lordship characterised by restraint in the claims made on those whom he regarded as his inferiors, whilst the favour of his protection and patronage allowed the social and economic life of the town to continue. The inhabitants of the town would have ample opportunity to contrast this attitude with the harsher policy adopted by the regent Morton in 1577 when they felt they 'gat na kyndnes' for their loyalty to the king's cause.⁴⁸

Morton's experience of the complexities of Aberdeen politics was essentially the same as Huntly's. Both realised that it was

impossible to remove the council from office, supported as it was by the force of customary authority: the incidental effect of any such attempt would have been to render the burgh ungovernable. Government in Aberdeen, as in the rest of the country, was highly personalised.⁴⁹ However, in Aberdeen instead of resting in an individual, as in a territorial lordship, it found expression through the collectivity of the merchant oligarchy. In effect the town council represented a co-operative of the natural leaders of the community of the burgh. The stability of the burgh rested on the workings of this small but supremely influential group, to challenge whom was to court disaster and promote the risk of urban strife, which would create more problems than it would solve. In his dealings with the town council Huntly respected the conventions of aristocratic government. The council was formed by men whose authority rested on who they were. The passage of time and the entrenchment of the hereditary principle had added further lustre to their role in society. Gilbert Menzies of Pitfodells gave expression to this sense of urban aristocratic power some fifteen years later when he entered into a bond of manrent with the sixth earl of Huntly in 1588. He undertook to serve the earl 'lyk as utheris gentilmen of the cuntre of our rank and estait'.⁵⁰ For the members of the burgess aristocracy of Aberdeen, leadership was a birthright, just as it was for the earl of Huntly. Both he and they shared a language of power and common assumptions as to how it should be exercised. Provided each respected the other's role and function tension was avoided, it was only when the distinctions between each became blurred that trouble loomed.

The success of Huntly's accommodation with the burgesses of Aberdeen is evident from his being able to spend so much of his time

away from Aberdeen once the focus of military and political activity had shifted to Edinburgh. The burgh was never in any serious danger of attack from the King's Party. In March 1571 the regent issued a proclamation summoning a force to march against the Queen's Party in the north. It obviously presented no serious threat to Huntly since during the following months he was playing a prominent part in directing events in Edinburgh.⁵¹ The closest the King's Party was able to get to Aberdeen was Brechin, which maintained a sizeable Gordon garrison and formed the southernmost outwork of Huntly's defences.⁵² Huntly's freedom of action and prolonged absences in the south depended on a reliable administration in the north-east which could depend on the compliance of its population. He was fortunate in being able to rely on his brother, Adam Gordon of Auchindoun, who swiftly secured control of the region and established a network of government with its centre at Aberdeen.

There are very few references to Adam Gordon's administration in the burgh of Aberdeen, or to the degree of involvement of the burgesses with it. Gordon was assisted by his own agents in the town. Amongst these was Captain Thomas Kerr, a long-standing associate of the Gordons. Notwithstanding his cruel reputation Huntly chose to install Kerr in a house on the Castlegate of Aberdeen, where he would be a near neighbour to the provost.⁵³ A significant show of strength might have been enough to overawe the burgesses and allow them to plead coercion should they be faced with any threat of reprisal by the King's Party.

In general the burgesses appear to have kept clear of any direct involvement with Adam Gordon. The bulk of his support seems to

have been drawn from the ranks of the affinity built up over the previous decades by successive earls of Huntly. At the justice ayre of 1574 seventy-seven supporters of Gordon were named as having participated in his campaigns in the north.⁵⁴

Many of these were lairds and their associates linked to the Gordons by ties of blood and patronage. Most of them originated in Easter Ross, Sutherland and the northernmost parts of the region. There was very little, if any, representation from the burgh of Aberdeen itself. Only two burgesses, Robert Gardyne and Thomas Meldrum, were fined for taking the queen's part in the civil war in company with Adam Gordon. The chief charge levelled against them was that they had provided him with victualling, perhaps using the emergency to make a quick profit. Whereas Gardyne's composition amounted only to thirteen pounds six shillings and eight pence, Meldrum was asked to find the larger sum of fifty pounds. However, it was stated that Meldrum had not only supplied Gordon with food: he had also assisted him in raising contributions from the inhabitants of the burgh.⁵⁵

Gardyne was amongst the better-off merchants of the burgh, paying twenty-six shillings and eight pence in tax in 1576. Meldrum, who paid only thirteen shillings and four pence in the same stent, could be classed as only moderately well-off.⁵⁶ Meldrum was fortunate in having influential friends since Alexander Knowles, an associate of the Gordons and high up in the counsels of the burgh, acted as cautioner for him and his fine was paid within a week.⁵⁷ Any links Gordon may have had with the more powerful burgesses of Aberdeen were either very well hidden or never publicly acknowledged.

The connections between the prominent burgesses and the Queen's Party appear to have been well camouflaged. Many of them faced

difficult conflicts of loyalty between their sense of communal solidarity on the one hand and their sense of kinship and family association with local lairds on the other. The former could best be served by maintaining a recognisable distance between themselves and the Gordons, whilst offering discreet financial support when their relatives or partners in the Queen's Party experienced hardship or prosecution. Thus at the justice ayre of 1574 Master George Johnston, the provost's son-in-law, was able to act as cautioner for Alexander Leslie of Pitcaple, and Andrew Buk another of the provost's relatives, could perform the same service for Mortimer of Craigower.⁵⁸

The policy of public distance and private accomodation between the burgesses and the Gordons functioned well; the occupation of the town could even work out to the benefit of its citizens. It was recorded in 1574 that no payments of the customs of the burgh of Aberdeen had been received by the exchequer between 1565 and 1573. The records do not explain the fate of the missing revenues, but they may well have vanished into the pockets of Thomas Menzies, the custumar and provost of the town.⁵⁹ Menzies may have taken advantage of the troubles to increase his own fortune. Certainly members of his own family were benefiting from the presence of the Queen's Party in the burgh, and from their dependence on the shipping interests of the merchants for their connections with the continent. Andrew Buk, the provost's son-in-law, was running cargoes from Aberdeen to Europe and, according to the privy council, carrying goods 'to furneis our Soverane Lordis declarit rebellis and disobedient subjects therewith'. On this occasion the cargo was arrested and sold for the king's service, but there must have been many other succesful journeys to

balance this one failure.⁶⁰ Patrick Menzies, another of the provost's relatives, was also involved in illicit trade across the North Sea. In 1573 his ship, The Andrew, augmented a cargo bound for France with certain suspicious passengers 'for heich and dangerous practices against the estate of Cristiane religioun, and the royall persoun and authorite of the Kingis Majestie oure Soverane Lord'. The ship was impounded at Leith and fell by escheat into the king's hands.⁶¹ Thus there was still profit to be made, even though the burgh was occupied; the risks did not always outweigh the advantages that might accrue to the burgesses.

The burgesses of Aberdeen were safe in pleading that any co-operation with the Gordons had been wrung from them by coercion so long as their was not a viable opposition to the earl of Huntly in the locality; their position would be seriously threatened should such an opposition emerge. In 1562 the fourth earl of Huntly had been brought down because, amongst other things, his affinity had failed to rally to him in sufficient strength.⁶² During the civil war the fifth earl's power was almost entirely due to the support he enjoyed in the locality. The central government was limited, as always in its efforts to shake Huntly's power, by a lack of any strong supporters in the north-east. During the civil war, and in an attempt to construct an alternative power system, the central government did what earlier governments had done and turned to the Forbes family, the traditional enemies of the Gordons.⁶³ Their efforts were to be crowned with spectacular failure.

In October 1571 the master of Forbes solicited the regent for a force to accompany him on an expedition against the Gordons.⁶⁴ The master already held a commission as the king's lieutenant in the

region,⁶⁵ and the opportunity offered by the increasing disarray of the Queen's Party in the latter half of 1571 and the early months of 1572 offered an ideal opportunity to strike a blow against the earl in his home territory. The decisive engagement took place on the outskirts of Aberdeen in November 1571. The resulting Gordon victory robbed the Forbes of their power in the area, and ensured that any assertion of the king's authority in could only come about through a victory or accomodation achieved elsewhere than in the north-east.⁶⁶

Although Adam Gordon's force was made up of men from the northern parts of the region, and no inhabitants of the burgh were recorded as having taken part in the battle, the burgesses could not hope to escape implication in the victory since Gordon had been using the town as his base. The merchants of Aberdeen were clearly terrified at the prospect that they might be condemned for failing to join with the Forbes in opposing the Gordons. In December they were anxious enough to begin negotiations on their own behalf with the king's government in an attempt to demonstrate their loyalty. David Marr, a prominent burgess with impeccable Protestant credentials and a record of support for the Congregation in 1560, was sent to meet the regent at Leith to:

...declare to him and the nobility the truth and contrarie of the sinister and wrang report made of this toun and inhabitants thereof anent the late troubles fallen between the Gordons and the Forbes with sic instructioun and informatioun of the venture and guid part of yis toun in yat efferis as ye said David hes resavit in credeit be declaratioun of ye council in ye north. 67

The burgesses were plainly worried at the turn events were taking, and were beginning to lose confidence in the view that their careful

distancing of themselves from the Queen's Party would save them should there be a day of reckoning. It began to dawn on them slowly that in the event of a settlement between Huntly and the regent, which on past form would leave Huntly's local power substantially intact, they would be left unprotected to face the wrath of the King's Party. It was imperative for them to open direct negotiations on their own behalf with the regent as it became more and more likely that they were not to be undisturbed for much longer.

The reverses suffered by the Queen's Party in the winter of 1572, and the lack of foreign intervention on behalf of the earl of Huntly and his clients, were adequate warnings to the council of the likely outcome of events. At the outset of 1573 it became clear to the merchant oligarchy that should the Queen's Party be defeated then not only would their political hold on burgh institutions suffer, but their half-hearted implementation of the religious changes would be used as a weapon against them. Consequently, in January 1573, various measures were adopted which would improve the Protestant profile of the town. Although the Reformation had been theoretically established in Aberdeen some thirteen years before, the burgh still lacked some essential features of the best regulated kirks; there was still no adequate system of poor relief. The head court therefore ordered that two men from every quarter should collect alms for the poor which should be distributed by the advice of the town council and the minister.⁶⁸ Significantly the kirk session was not to be involved in the operation at all, and even the minister was not to have a decisive voice in how the money should be disbursed. Even in the apparently trivial matter of the distribution of civic charity the council was to keep control.

Later on in January 1573 the council tackled the vexed question of the hospital for the poor and orphaned. In 1567 the Greyfriars friary in Aberdeen had been given to the provost and council of the burgh to serve as a hospital for the poor, maimed and orphaned.⁶⁹ By 1573 this purpose was still unfulfilled and the buildings were being used for other functions which were augmenting the profits of certain burgesses. The council ordered that steps should be taken to realise the original intention of the gift.⁷⁰ These were perhaps the most obvious measures to be taken should the town be called to account for its ecclesiastical discipline and its stewardship of the endowments of the old Church. In Aberdeen, as in other burghs, there was a general reluctance to finance the institutions and pastoral care of the new Church, but in Aberdeen, unlike other burghs, there was no effective external pressure on the council to ensure that such institutions were established and such care exercised.⁷¹

The conclusion of the Pacification of Perth in February 1573 made it clear that the burgh was to be left to its fate at the hands of the regent Morton. Even Huntly's lieutenant in Aberdeen, Thomas Kerr, who had been mentioned by name in the agreement,⁷² took the sensible precaution of withdrawing from the town.⁷³ Kerr's departure was followed by Adam Gordon's retirement to France, where he occupied himself in minor political machinations which caused only slight inconvenience to the regent.⁷⁴ Thus the burgh was once more ground between the twin millstones of local and national politics. Whilst Huntly's power endured in the north-east, the corporate dependence of his alliance system protected the conservative interest, even those whose attitude was ambiguous like the burgesses of Aberdeen. Once

the keystone of power, in the shape of the earl's influence in the region, was removed then the various constituent parts of the governmental structure were prey to attack from the regent.

Morton's immediate interest in the region lay in raising money in compositions to cover debts incurred during the war. He also needed to make new allies in the hope of undermining Huntly's power in the locality and lessening the dependence of central government on the earl's agency. The final, and almost incidental, issue was an attempt to reduce the areas of religious conservatism in the country and bring about a greater degree of religious conformity. Paradoxically the fulfilment of these ambitions was to ensure that Aberdeen, formerly the king's nominal ally, suffered more at the regent's hands than many of the neighbouring lairds who had taken up arms against him. Morton's visit to Aberdeen in the late summer of 1574 was intended to be exemplary. To ensure that there would be no magnatial interference, the earl of Huntly was kept well out of the way in ward in the west of Scotland,⁷⁵ and Adam Gordon was safely in France, where the regent believed he would do less harm than at home.⁷⁶ Morton was left with a free hand; like Queen Mary in 1562 and the earl of Moray in 1569 he ensured that the justice meted out in Aberdeen would have adequate publicity by bringing along the English ambassador so that reports of his activity would reach Queen Elizabeth in London.⁷⁷ The earls of Rothes, Buchan and Errol, together with a fairly full complement of advisers, joined him to stress the comprehensiveness of his support and to overawe the queen's supporters. In case there was any doubt left in his opponents' minds, Morton also issued a proclamation ordering the levies within the sheriffdoms of Fife, Kinross, Perth, Forfar and Kincardineshire, all of them reliable

areas, to meet him at Brechin and to accompany him to Aberdeen.⁷⁸ He must have been expecting fairly rich pickings in the north since he also transported a large clerical staff to assist him with the judicial business.⁷⁹

Given the nature of his preparations for his expedition, Morton may have been disappointed with its result. The sums of money yielded to the exchequer were not as great as he may have hoped. How much this was due to his own conciliatory policies and how much to a desperate shortage of cash in the region is not quite clear. When the earl of Moray visited the north in 1569 he had imposed compositions of £32,085, of which only £4,297 had been discharged.⁸⁰ The earl of Morton may have been counting on receiving similar sums. However, the war had proved extremely expensive both to the earl of Huntly and to his clients. Moray had forced Huntly to pay unheard-of sums in compositions in 1569. By 1573 Huntly was already withdrawing his troops northwards to Aberdeen in the hope of being able to find the money to pay them there.⁸¹ At the end of the war his finances were in a chaotic state with his property mortgaged and debts piling up.⁸² Morton may have seriously underestimated the financial embarrassment of his opponents and was eventually to consider tailoring his demands to their resources.

The total amount raised by Morton from the justice ayre at Aberdeen amounted to only £11,656 of which he considered it expedient to remit £6,330. In many ways the balance made the preparations seem hardly worthwhile: the expenses of the ayre cost the treasury alone £440, which does not include the cost of the muster and the additional expenses met by the earls who accompanied the regent to the north.⁸³ Morton's apparently generous policy of discharging

fines may have been motivated by political as well as economic considerations. He needed allies in the north if the threat from the earl of Huntly was to be neutralised. The Gordon strength lay in their affinity, and so if the central government could win wider support from amongst this group, or at least refrain from alienating them any further, this object might be accomplished. Certainly the earl of Errol's newly-won loyalty was rewarded with some consideration; the earl, his brother and their tenants were excused all but £2,000 of the £4,064 fine imposed on them. Another group of Errol's servants received a complete discharge of their compositions amounting to £783. Similarly with two other prominent supporters of Huntly, Irvine of Drum and his dependents together with Leslie of Wardres and his, the former being discharged his fine of £1,000 and the latter the colossal sum of £3,033.⁸⁴ By attempting to conciliate the chief offenders, those with still powerful and dangerous allies, Morton was still left with a financial problem. It was then that he turned his attention to the burgh of Aberdeen.

Although the burgh had technically remained loyal to the king throughout the civil war the burgesses had certainly not exerted themselves in his cause. Far from suffering unduly at the hands of the earl of Huntly, they had derived a measure of immunity and prosperity from his occupation. Their plea that they had been coerced into contributing to the queen's cause rang slightly hollow, especially since they had remained neutral in the fight between the Gordons and the Forbes at the battle of the Crabstane. Huntly's surrender left them friendless, for they had not done much to support either party. Morton realised that the burgh was dependent for its autonomy on alliance with central government. He capitalised on this

dependence by wringing as much money as he could out of the inhabitants of Aberdeen, adopting the novel policy of conciliating his enemies whilst plundering his friends.

Morton's treatment of the burgh was harsh to say the least; the burgesses certainly expected better at his hands. The regent judged their case himself and gave them to understand that he expected 'ane contributione of monie according to thair substance'. Their substance must have been very great since over half the sum raised by the justice ayre in the north was to be derived from the burgh of Aberdeen. The burgesses were ordered to make a contribution of 3,000 merks to the crown and to spend a further 1,000 merks on erecting the hospital. There must have been considerable amounts of liquid cash in the town, despite the recent troubles, since the burgesses were ordered to see that £1,000 was paid to the treasurer by 20 September, and a further £1,000 by 20 October.⁸⁵ Morton's attitude was harsh but confident: he knew that the burgh would have no option but to pay. It was rich enough to find the money, and failure to find it would result in further interference in the internal workings of burgh government which would threaten its conservative way of life and the oligarchy which controlled its affairs.

One of Morton's chief political levers against the burgh, and his principal reason for suspecting it of disaffection, was its failure to implement the spirit of the reformed religion. In many ways the machinery and discipline of Protestantism had been established in the town, but its exercise had been so tightly controlled as to be rendered almost completely ineffective. When the regent arrived in Aberdeen he found a community dominated by Catholic survivalism and conservative sympathies. The burgesses had managed to maintain this

way of life by an astute use of the political skills they had acquired during the previous half-century of dealing with central government: masterly inactivity combined with judicious temporising. It was clear that for the Reformation to take root and thrive in Aberdeen a whole infra-structure of power, patronage and kinship would have to be dismantled. The incidental effect of such an action would have been to render the burgh ungovernable; the immediate consequence would have been the earl of Morton's failure to receive the money he needed. By imposing a heavy composition on the burgh Morton shook the confidence of the burgesses in the closed corporation which had hitherto preserved the town from hardship. He also warned the burgesses that a measure of conformity was necessary if their authority was to be maintained.

In Scotland, as in England, Catholicism survived best in those parts of the country which were remote from the central government's control, and where public authority was concentrated in relatively private hands. Such areas as the north-east in general and Aberdeen in particular, marked as they were by the conventions of traditional seigneurial authority, offered ideal territory for the survival of Catholic beliefs and practices. The social framework of the region was overwhelmingly conservative, and the rhythms of popular culture were still marked by the observances which had given meaning and coherence to the cycles of daily life. The religious revolution of 1560 had not been accompanied by an equivalent social revolution. Popular culture remained unchanged save that it lacked the public forms of Catholicism. The public veneration of images, processions, the ceaseless round of masses, elaborate funeral rites and festivals of saints began to disappear and left a gap in social life. A significant body

of opinion in Aberdeen retained Catholic habits but was at a loss as to how to articulate them, or the basic instincts they represented, under the new dispensation. As a result a number of customs survived and a number of demonstrations took place which gave great offence to the regent when he arrived in the town in 1574.

At the head of the earl of Morton's instructions to the council designed to eradicate Catholic customs was the demand that they inhibit the celebration of festival days in the town.⁸⁶ In the kind of Catholicism that depended on a complex of social practices the observances of traditional holidays could be as significant as other more obvious devotional practices. It was to prove particularly difficult to suppress Catholic practices in those burgh institutions where social and religious identities overlapped. The craft guilds are prime examples of religious societies which were deprived of their traditional means of publicly expressing their communal solidarity by the Reformation. They preserved some vestiges of their Catholic ethos by refusing to work on the customary religious holidays of the burgh. In February 1574 the deacons of the cordiners, websters, tailors and baxters were ordered by the kirk session to see that their members did not observe any holy day or festival 'quhilk wes usit of auld tyme befor'. The only holy day to be marked was the sabbath.⁸⁷ This prohibition did not appear to have much effect, since in January 1576 there was a sizeable demonstration of conservative sentiment when all of the craftsmen of the burgh refrained from working on Christmas day.⁸⁸ Aberdeen was not the only burgh in which the celebration of the ancient festivals of the christian year continued to pose a problem to Protestant consciences: St Andrews experienced the same problems with its craftsmen.⁸⁹ The close confines of the

craft guild fostered Catholic practices and contributed greatly to the survival of some Catholic attitudes.⁹⁰

Attachment to the rhythms of the Church year also makes its appearance in another burgh institution, the grammar school. In 1569 the council had granted a Latin petition from the pupils of the grammar school that they should be allowed to enjoy the usual Christmas holidays.⁹¹ In April 1574, as part of the Protestantising policies of the council, the kirk session orderèd that this practice should be suppressed. Clearly some of the inhabitants of the burgh continued to cling to the custom since the session ordered that if parents refused to send their children to school on those days they should be reported to the authorities.⁹² The tradition of humanist learning in Aberdeen had been a long and healthy one.⁹³ The place of the schoolmaster was particularly significant in the humanist scheme of things: he was charged with the duty of bringing up his charges not only in learning but also in virtue. In many ways he was a quasi-charismatic figure who could exert a great deal of influence over the moral and confessional development of his pupils.⁹⁴ The master of the Aberdeen grammar school was John Henderson, a Catholic. A Catholic schoolmaster operating within a conservative burgh had the ideal opportunity of delaying the impact of the Reformation on his pupils and perpetuating some traces of Catholic belief and customs. Henderson's departure for France may have precipitated the session's clamp-down on the school's Christmas holidays.⁹⁵ It also demonstrated how necessary it was for the new Kirk to establish itself within close-knit burgh institutions which could act as breeding grounds for crypto-Catholicism. Edinburgh was to confront this problem directly in its attempts to dismiss William Robertson its schoolmaster.⁹⁶ Henderson's withdrawal to France was to save Aberdeen similar troubles.

The extent of Catholic survival in Aberdeen was obvious even from the ordering of the parish kirk. Although it had been stripped of its vestments, plate and even its chandeliers, many of the more solid fixtures remained in position. The organ was still intact in 1574; despite an earlier instruction from the council the treasurer had not seen to its removal. During his visit to the town the earl of Morton ordered it to be dismantled and sold. Poignantly the task was delegated to the former master of the song school, John Black, who must often have played it in the past.⁹⁷ The finely carved choir stalls and the timber choir screen were also remarkable survivals of the events of 1560. The stalls were removed in accordance with the regent's orders, but they were not destroyed and were simply placed in another part of the church. The choir screen remained intact along with the rood loft until the 1590s when the church was divided in two.⁹⁸ Although most of the altars had been removed, the reredos of at least one of them was still standing in 1584.⁹⁹ The building may have been less richly furnished than it had been before 1560, but it still bore the essential outlines of a Catholic church.

Despite being confronted with a direct order from the regent to re-order their parish church and eradicate some of the traces of Catholic practice, the council still temporised in the hope of being able to avoid compliance.¹⁰⁰ At some point after his departure word must have reached Morton that his orders were not being obeyed, since he wrote to the burgesses asking for an explanation of their disobedience. In their reply they hastened to reassure him by stating that only the casing of the organ remained to be broken up, and that the choir stalls along with the screens at the backs of all

of the altars had been removed, save one which was useful for keeping the draughts off the congregation whilst they were at prayer.¹⁰¹

There were a number of reasons moving the burgesses to delay the abolition of some of the external trappings of Catholicism. A number of them remained to be convinced that Protestantism had come to stay. Just as in England many parishes with their clergy seem to have hoped or expected a Catholic restoration and therefore retained their altars and images, so did Aberdeen.¹⁰² The survival of images, not only in public places but also in private hands, was another cause of the regent's displeasure.¹⁰³ Again the burgesses were forced to dispose of those that survived, even so many of them must have been hidden away for better days. In order to satisfy the regent's complaints the burgesses wrote to him that they had confiscated a respectable number of statues and crucifixes and burnt them.¹⁰⁴ Apart from being inspired by purely devotional reasons for preserving such artefacts, the burgesses were also moved by economic considerations. The adornments of the parish church represented centuries of burgh investment and it was not fitting that such endowments should be lightly disposed of. Moreover, should the religious climate change then the burgesses would have saved themselves a lot of money by making structural alterations to the parish church and getting rid of the essentials of Catholic worship. However, their concern for the beauty of holiness was not indiscriminate; it does not seem to have extended far outside the bounds of the burgh. In June 1560 Andrew Buk, the provost's son-in-law, broke into the abbey of Kinloss and carried off the bells 'hersis, pillaris, standing chadlaris, lettronis and other

brazen work'.¹⁰⁵ His apparently reforming zeal had not prevented him from being amongst those who had objected to the arrival of the Reformation in Aberdeen.¹⁰⁶ For Buk, as for others, it was possible to be iconoclast abroad and iconodule at home. The Menzies family maintained a similarly self-interested approach. In benefiting from the sale of the treasure of the parish kirk they showed how it was possible to combine deep conservatism and opposition to change with a cool and pragmatic approach to ecclesiastical property, seeing it as an asset to be realised in advance of competitors, especially if the latter happened to be the central government.¹⁰⁷

The survival of Catholic sympathies in the north-east was undoubtedly promoted by the conservative instincts of the earl of Huntly and his gentry clientage. Catholicism gave expression to the ideals of communal solidarity, local consciousness and pride of place. For the lairds of northern Scotland, as for the barons of northern England, Catholicism seemed the 'natural religion'.¹⁰⁸ Protestantism as it then stood, seriously short of ministers and exceedingly underdeveloped institutionally, could not express the political and social realities of Aberdeen or the north-east. The conservative lairds, and the equally conservative burgesses of Aberdeen, distrusted Protestantism as an alien and divisive force. Its stress on a particular kind of participation together with its tendency towards the egalitarian involvement of the congregation in the exercise of discipline, threatened long-accepted notions of order and hierarchy in local society. After the Reformation the community came to be understood in a different way. The increased emphasis on individual and personal morality, as signs of a life of true virtue which alone qualified one to bear rule in society, ran contrary to contemporary understanding

of how urban and rural government functioned.¹⁰⁹ Catholicism in the north-east was not simply a religious sentiment but also a social sentiment. In order to dislodge it, it would be necessary to develop an alternative machinery of government to engineer social change and dismantle the conservative framework of life.

The earl of Huntly's influence may have appeared as a threat to the liberties of Aberdeen, but it was a positive benefit to those who wished to continue their Catholic practices. In fact what developed in the north-east were two patterns of Catholicism, the seigneurial type and the urban or burghess variety. In many ways one conditioned the growth and preservation of the other, and each reflected the construction and concerns of the other. Clearly the mass was widely available in and around Aberdeen. The efforts of the Protestant ministers, and the outraged complaints of successive General Assemblies, were gravely hampered by the survival of mass centres in around the burgh of Aberdeen. In 1572 the General Assembly was complaining about mass being said in Old Aberdeen.¹¹⁰ In 1587 the situation still had not improved since the General Assembly of that year issued another lament about the celebration of mass regularly in the chancellor's house in Old Aberdeen.¹¹¹ The chancellor on both occasions was Master Alexander Seton, a brother of William Seton of Meldrum and connected with his mother with the Gordons of Haddo. A number of significant strands of local social and political life met in Alexander Seton: the ecclesiastical and the noble. He was a notable worker for the Marian cause during the civil war. When Morton appeared in Aberdeen in 1574 Seton was one of the prominent Marians he wished to interview. Seton, perhaps wisely, chose not to appear and was put to the horn.¹¹² Lord Seton,

another prominent Marian, appears to have maintained some kind of establishment in Old Aberdeen during these years. He was able to offer shelter to lady Northumberland there after the rising in northern England. Whilst enjoying his hospitality she was able to benefit from hearing mass daily.¹¹³ There were also a number of conservative lairds' houses in the vicinity where a Catholic priest could count on a welcome and where he could find small Catholic congregations.¹¹⁴ Occasionally their owners were prosecuted for non-conformity. Thus in 1575 Jean Gordon, lady of Fyvie, was to be put on trial for hearing mass,¹¹⁵ and a summons was also issued against Lady Aboyne for allowing mass to be said at her house at Craig of Boyne, and at her lodgings at Aberdeen and Turriff.¹¹⁶ Even devotional articles associated with traditional Catholic piety appear to have been readily available in Aberdeen and the surrounding areas. Some years after the civil war a Jesuit priest was able to report that rosaries were on sale at a fair in Turriff.¹¹⁷ In this way Aberdeen and its hinterland offered ample opportunities for those who wished to attend mass to do so in comparative security. Despite occasional prosecutions, Catholic practices were likely to continue as long as the earl of Huntly and his affinity provided the political and social framework under which their fellow conservatives could shelter.

One of the chief factors encouraging the survival of Catholic customs was the abiding presence and continued influence of former Catholic clergy. Before the Reformation the clerical population had been relatively high.¹¹⁸ There was no expulsion of clergy from the town after 1560, and provided that the former clergy were prepared to give the minimum of conformity, they were allowed to live peacefully

in the burgh. In 1575 there were still at least five chaplains of St Nicholas kirk living in the burgh.¹¹⁹ Former members of the burgh's religious houses also stayed on in the town. The council was even willing to support them when they fell on hard times. A Carmelite, Richard Garden, was ordered to be supported by the chief men of the town in rotation, whilst in 1566 one of the former chaplains of St Nicholas was given a secure job by the council as keeper of the newly-established lighthouse.¹²⁰ By appointing the former chaplain to this office the council was continuing the traditional practice of employing ecclesiastics in the burgh service. One of the former chaplains of the parish church, Master John Kennedy, who also held a canonry in the cathedral of Old Aberdeen, occupied the extremely influential position of town clerk depute for forty years until his death in 1589.

One of the most notable of the former clergy to remain in Aberdeen was the ex-prior of the Carmelite house, Master John Failford. After the Reformation Failford found refuge in the house of the provost where he was later described as a servant.¹²¹ However, he must have lived in circumstances of comparative ease since he was able to receive books from abroad, and to lend sizeable sums of money to other former Catholic clergy.¹²² That he did draw his friar's pension during these years suggests a measure of conformity.¹²³ The consistent association of various branches of the Menzies family with Catholicism suggests that he may have served them as domestic chaplain, possibly using the altar vessels of the parish kirk which Patrick Menzies had purchased after the Reformation.¹²⁴ Certainly opportunities did exist for former clergy to serve wealthy burgesses as well as wealthy lairds. Not all of them chose retirement to a pleasant

country seat like John Wight an Aberdeen Dominican. Wight was taken in by the Andersons of Finzean and remained with them until his death.¹²⁵ Others remained in Aberdeen where they were of some use in keeping the old faith alive. By using their services the burgesses were in effect claiming for themselves the same facilities as the conservative aristocracy and initiating the process of Catholic withdrawal to the confines of the urban household.

In Aberdeen, as in other burghs, the pattern of non-conformity was pluriform and rarely expressed itself in terms of outright defiance of the Kirk. The process of Catholic withdrawal from the worshipping community of the burgh was a slow one, as it was in English communities.¹²⁶ The process of disengagement took a number of forms which were conditioned by the increasing rigour of the Kirk's system of trial and examination as it struggled to free its own institutions from conservative control. A continual problem for the new Kirk was the refusal of a number of the inhabitants of the burgh to have their children baptised or to have their sons and daughters married before the minister.¹²⁷ Non-communicating was a less obvious and pressing problem since communion services were held but rarely, but non-attendance at church was regularly denounced. After the arrival of John Craig, a more enthusiastic and rigorous minister than Adam Heriot, in 1573 various attempts were made to improve the level of attendance at the kirk and to ensure that no rival events should be staged during the preaching which might draw people away from their religious duties. Merchants were ordered to close their booths during the sermons and not to open them again until the preaching was concluded.¹²⁸ A year later this was still a problem and the session made further attempts to prevent people from playing on the links, 'gangand in the

gaitt', or selling merchandise on Sundays.¹²⁹ Even when such non-involvement was challenged it was still possible for non-conformers to drift into a minimum of conformity whilst continuing to live as 'private' Catholics.

The other social grouping within the burgh community which helped to foster and sustain a conservative outlook was the household, centred as it was around the family and kinship group. One of the measures ordered by the regent to be taken against continuing conservatism was specifically directed against Catholic households, more particularly against the households of prominent burgesses. The web of family alliances and business associations built up over the sixteenth century and centring on the council chamber, and latterly on the kirk session, encouraged a close sense of co-operation which included toleration for traditional beliefs and practices. Catholicism was so deeply ingrained in the upper ranks of burgh society that a full-scale attack on it, apart from being highly impractical, would challenge the customary forms of government. Even the regent recognised this necessary fact of political life in the burgh when he publicly ordered the bailies of the town to ensure that religious conformity and discipline should reign in their own homes as well as in the burgh at large.¹³⁰ The regent may have censured them strongly but he was in no position to remove them from office.

Of the four bailies censured by the regent in 1574 two had close links with Catholicism through their wives, whilst one was an outspoken opponent of the Reformation. Master Patrick Rutherford was connected with the Catholic Menzies family through his wife Marjorie, who was a daughter of the provost.¹³¹ Master George Middleton was married into the family of a prominent local conservative

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laird, Irvine of Drum. Middleton's wife consistently refused to conform to the new kirk and was brought before the kirk session on a number of occasions before finally submitting in June 1574.¹³² The third bailie, Gilbert Menzies of Coull, had originally opposed the coming of the Reformation in 1560 and had maintained his position ever since. During the early months of 1574 his recalcitrance had been thought of sufficient significance to earn him a period of imprisonment in Edinburgh. He was only released from prison on the understanding that he would come to communion and give confession of his faith when he returned home.¹³³ Menzies' non-conformity, and the generally lukewarm attitude of many of his relatives, had obviously damaged the Protestant cause in the town. Despite his being brought before the regent and his council twice in Edinburgh, he maintained his defiance on his return to Aberdeen and was once more rebuked by Morton during his visitation of the north.¹³⁴ The considerable body of Catholic opinion remaining active in the town was focussed in certain households. It became apparent as time went on that there was no prospect of strengthening the Protestant establishment until such 'house churches' operating an alternative system of Catholic sacramental practice were rooted out.

The narrow base from which Protestantism operated within the burgh was rendered considerably narrower by the degree of Catholic representation on the town council which was inevitably reflected in the composition of the kirk session. Three of the bailies who were summoned before the regent in 1574 for allowing Catholic practices in their households were all members of the kirk session of 1573.¹³⁵ The danger faced by the minister and the small number of committed Protestants within the burgh was that the political and religious institutions of the

town would become extensions of the powerful burgess households, and that the equally powerful conservative influences operating from within those households would be used to delay, if not entirely inhibit the growth of Protestantism in Aberdeen. The subversion of the machinery of Protestant ecclesiastical government in the town, and its exploitation by conservative opinion, ensured the relative powerlessness of the minister unless his authority was bolstered by external support. The chief aim of the Protestant party, once Morton's power was assured, was to break the power of the Catholic household and its stranglehold on the life of the Kirk.

The degree of influence exercised by Catholics in the higher councils of the burgh can be seen in the character of the campaign of gentle repression launched by the kirk session in 1573 and 1574. A large part of the inspiration for this campaign must have derived from the newly-appointed minister to Aberdeen, Master John Craig. In August 1572 Craig had moved from his post as minister in Edinburgh to Montrose where he was able to work in close association with Erskine of Dun.¹³⁶ Some time after March 1573 Craig arrived in Aberdeen to take up the pastoral charge recently occupied by Adam Heriot. The General Assembly of 1573 realised in making such an appointment that a man who could survive the perils of the civil war in Edinburgh would not be easily outmanoeuvred or intimidated by conservative opinion.¹³⁷ Craig's move to Aberdeen was one of the first fruits of the Pacification of Perth and the opening shot in a renewed campaign by the Assembly against the northern Catholics. In 1560 the ruling oligarchy in Aberdeen had retained direction of religious affairs in the town by direct involvement in the appointment of the first minister, Adam Heriot, a man of moderate temperament.¹³⁸ By gaining

control of the nomination of the minister in Aberdeen and promoting Craig to that position, the Assembly was able to exert greater influence over local ecclesiastical affairs. By using the minister as a lever, the Protestants in the burgh were able to begin forcing open the closed doors of the kirk session, which had resisted the Reformation thus far. Soon after his arrival Craig made it clear that he intended to act as a new broom. During the course of 1573 various measures were enacted by the session to promote greater conformity between Aberdeen and the other burghs in the matter of ecclesiastical government; such measures were not without their opponents.

It was a comparatively novel experience for the burgesses of Aberdeen to enjoy the attentions of a militant minister. Adam Heriot had been moderate and perhaps slightly timorous by nature. His lack of fervour had been generously rewarded by the council with a salary of £200 per annum, a sum equal to Knox's in Edinburgh.¹³⁹ He was also assisted by two Aberdonians as readers, John Leslie and Walter Cullen.¹⁴⁰ The burgesses thereby hoped that any enthusiasm imported from outside the burgh would be tempered by local counsel offered by the reader. Although Craig had been accused of adopting a neutral attitude during the civil war, something that might have recommended him to the burgesses of Aberdeen, his thoughts about Queen Mary were far from moderate and must have alarmed the loyalists on the council.¹⁴¹ The minister's salary was to be met from the thirds whilst that of the reader was to be met out of the common good of the town. On the whole the salaries were paid, if grudgingly and irregularly.¹⁴² Occasionally the town would give some sign of its favourable disposition towards its minister by offering him a gift either of money or clothes.¹⁴³ On

the whole the council preferred that the minister should respect established patterns of government and customary spheres of influence. Craig soon showed that he had little intention of following these conventions.

Part of Craig's difficulty involved enforcing some kind of accountability on the kirk session. Far from being an open representative body it had very early on adopted the habits and character of the town council. Its membership was more or less static as far as the eldership was concerned, although there was a greater degree of mobility amongst the corps of deacons. Perhaps not surprisingly, the session reflected more or less accurately the composition of the council with its various interest groups. Like the council its meetings were shrouded in secrecy with its members forbidden to reveal what was discussed there.¹⁴⁴ In many ways the conservatism of the kirk session was inevitable since there was no opening for an alternative establishment in Aberdeen: the session accurately reflected its constituency. Aberdeen, unlike Edinburgh, did not shelter an influential privy kirk which could serve as a resource from which a Protestant establishment could be drawn.¹⁴⁵ Instead the burgesses carried over the attitudes of civic Catholicism into their responsibility for the new Kirk. They conceived the Church very much in terms of function rather than mission; their lack of a sense of mission was to prove a major disappointment to their more evangelical colleagues. The proprietorial air with which they regarded the ecclesiastical life of the burgh was afforded much more scope under the new dispensation. Whereas in the past they had merely acted as patrons, after 1560 they were cast in the role of governors of the ecclesiastical polity.

In 1560 the burgesses had managed to exert their role in ecclesiastical government by choosing Heriot for their minister. In 1573 that right of participation was temporarily lost when Craig was more or less imposed on them by a General Assembly. In 1582 they were able to reassert it in the case of Craig's successor. In September 1582 Master Peter Blackburn was admitted by 'the haill toune' as minister of the burgh, the council was thereby able to regain the initiative which had been denied them when Craig was appointed.¹⁴⁶ The council tended to use their role in ecclesiastical government in the cause of stability. Although many of the trappings of Catholicism had been removed by 1574 the essential attitudes remained. The problem facing both Craig and his opponents was how the basic rhythms of oligarchy could be adapted to include a greater degree of congregational participation by those who favoured the new Kirk.

Once Craig had established himself in Aberdeen he began to feel confident enough to urge conformity with other burghs in the matter of the trial and examination of deacons. Some direct voice was allowed to the congregation in the election of the kirk session since it was recorded that the elders and deacons had been chosen by the votes of the congregation. In September 1573 the session agreed that the minister, elders, deacons and reader, should be examined four times a year by the whole kirk to see whether their lives were of sufficient quality for them to exercise their function.¹⁴⁷ This was a further blow for greater congregational participation in government. However, if Craig had hoped for any major improvement in godly discipline because of this measure he was doomed to disappointment. The first time the session was examined in January 1574 nobody

came forward to indict its members for any fault.¹⁴⁸ In many ways the reluctance of the congregation to criticise its kirk session is perfectly intelligible. The provost and ten of the thirteen elders were all members of the council.¹⁴⁹ Few of the inhabitants of the burgh would have been keen to make enemies of such powerful men by accusing them, no matter how justly, of a lack of reforming zeal. An act of pious correction could easily be construed as an act of political rebellion. Clearly the elders of the session were aware of the potential threat such a regular examination could pose to them. It allowed of the possibility for direct challenge of civic authority, and such opportunities had been rigidly controlled for many years in Aberdeen. Consequently since no one had come forward in January 1574 to avail themselves of the opportunity to complain about the session, the burgh establishment decided that such a custom was unnecessary and dispensed with it unless occasion demanded otherwise.¹⁵⁰

The difficulty of getting the session to assume its proper responsibilities under the reformed constitution of the burgh formed the background to the campaign against non-conformity in the burgh during 1573 and 1574. Having secured a kirk session elected by the votes of the congregation in September 1573, and an agreement for regular examination of the office-holders of the Kirk, the first moves were made by the Protestant lobby against Catholics.¹⁵¹ Already the General Assembly had left no doubt as to the policy to be pursued against dissenters after the Pacification of Perth. In March 1573 the Assembly had ordered that all Papists were to be summarily proceeded against, and that all of those who refused to hear the word of God or to receive the sacraments were to be excommunicated.¹⁵² Aberdeen had received further warning that it could not hope to escape unscathed

from this new mood of militancy when moves against non-conforming clergy were initiated by the privy council. By far the largest contingent of conservative clerics was concentrated in the north-east, and in June 1573 the council began to implement there the legislation which had been formulated in January of the same year.¹⁵³ A particular target in Aberdeen was offered by the group of academics and prominent ecclesiastics who had been associated in former days with King's College. Master Alexander Anderson, the former principal who by this time must have been an old man, was summoned to Edinburgh to subscribe to the Confession of Faith. He actually made the journey and despite having to find surety of 1,000 merks he ignored the council's instruction to remain in Edinburgh and returned to Aberdeen, where he appears to have been able to live out his days in comparative peace.¹⁵⁴ However, his defiance could not be totally ignored, and he suffered excommunication and deprivation of his benefices, which the regent, characteristically, bestowed on one of his kinsmen, Archibald Douglas an inhabitant of Old Aberdeem.¹⁵⁵ Similarly Patrick Myreton, the former treasurer of the cathedral, refused to subscribe to the Confession of Faith and was deprived of his benefices. Myreton chose the option of exile in Paris to insecurity at home.¹⁵⁶ These measures gave the burgh fair warning of what to expect should it not improve its Protestant respectability.

The first to be called before the kirk session in Aberdeen when the burgh began its own local campaign of repression was Master Robert Rust, a notary public and former student of King's College. He had gone on to practice law in Old Aberdeen where he frequently appeared as a witness to charters signed by Bishop Gordon.¹⁵⁷ It may have been that in his particular case the Aberdeen kirk session, encouraged

by the minister, found it easier to initiate proceedings against a lawyer based in the Gordon stronghold of Old Aberdeen rather than begin a purge in Aberdeen itself. Rust's prosecution was exemplary in that it might serve as a warning to encourage others to discretion in their religious practice. Certainly an extension of the prosecutions for non-conformity into Aberdeen itself could not occur without external help and encouragement. The chief obstacle to such a move was the Menzies family with its pronounced conservative sympathies. A confrontation with the Menzies was all the more difficult since the family numbered the provost and a number of councillors amongst its members. Whilst Catholicism was kept alive in the households of the burgh its character was different to that of other burghs because of the distinctive constitution of Aberdeen. Catholic influence spilled out beyond the bounds of the household and kin group and was a powerful factor affecting burgh policy.

There was no wholesale wave of oppression against Catholic sympathisers in Aberdeen. Prosecutions were highly selective and prudent. The Protestant party was wise not to threaten what it could not perform. Moreover, the degree of local autonomy enjoyed by the burgh militated against the local implementation of any broader programme of repression. It was only the regent's arrival in the town in August 1574 that allowed firmer measures to be taken. Until he arrived the Protestant party was compelled to adopt an eirenic attitude to non-attendance at the kirk, and to other signs of disaffection amongst the inhabitants of the burgh. In November 1573 the session had ordered that those who refused to come to the parish kirk were 'to be first handillit and travellit with gentilly, gif be ony meanes

possible thay may be von, uderwais to proceid aganis tham according to the actis of the Kirk and Parliament'.¹⁵⁸ As a result it might have been a long time before the penalty of excommunication needed to be invoked. It rapidly became clear that there could be no progress in the reformation of the burgh until the Catholic keystone in burgh society was removed or won over to the Protestant cause. The Menzies family, and those of their clients and associates who remained sympathetic to Catholicism, were high on the list of those to be brought to the Protestant obedience.

The first member of the Menzies family to suffer the attentions of the privy council had been Gibert Menzies of Coull, the provost's eldest son. The privy council had given a lead to the Protestant party in Aberdeen by proceeding against Menzies in March 1574. He had been briefly imprisoned and had only be released having deposited a surety of £1,000 and given an undertaking that he would be an attender at the kirk and receive communion. Despite these assurances the regent called him before the council in August ordering him to communicate or suffer excommunication.¹⁵⁹ This prosecution seems to have had the desired effect since soon after Gilbert's return from Edinburgh the session summoned Master Thomas Menzies, the provost's son to answer a charge of non-conformity. He refused to appear and the session, giving a demonstration of the limits of their power, could do nothing to compell him to do so. On the same day Janet Maitland, the provost's sister-in-law, was called before the session to accept the points of Protestant doctrine she had hitherto refused. Along with her there appeared Bessie Seinyeor, the daughter of a prominent Marian burgess of Edinburgh and widow of the former clerk to the Aberdeen kirk session.¹⁶⁰ The list of prominent Aberdonians did not end

there but included Janet Knowles, Bishop Gordon's concubine, who said that she would confess all good things and refuse all evil things but she would not renounce the mass.¹⁶¹

The first campaign against the distinguished nonconformists in the burgh was unsuccessful. Their standing was such that they refused to co-operate with the session there was very little that could be done about it. However, further efforts were made to ensure a greater degree of Protestant practice as time passed. In June 1574, probably in preparation for the regent's visitation of the burgh, steps were once more taken against the Catholic sympathisers in the town, and the same names appear amongst those called to answer for non-attendance and practicing Catholicism. Master Thomas Menzies was once more summoned and actually appeared on this occasion. He refused to give confession of his faith then but, adopting a common device to avoid submission, he asked for time to consider his answer.¹⁶² On the same day, Thomas Menzies' aunt, Janet Maitland, once more refused point-blank to submit to the Kirk.¹⁶³ The session was slightly more fortunate in the cases of Janet Knowles, Bessie Seinyeor, Marjory Urquhart and Katharine Hay, all of whom submitted to the Kirk.¹⁶⁴ They were joined by an equally distinguished lady, Isobel Irvine, the wife of one of the bailies, Master George Middleton.¹⁶⁵

The spate of actions for non-conformity seems to have caused little disturbance in the burgh. Many of those who were accused did eventually conform even though many of them were closely related to members of the kirk session. Thomas Menzies, the provost, was in the invidious position of seeing two of his sons as well as his sister-in-law appear before the session. Gilbert Menzies, also an elder of the session sat in judgement on his wife, whilst Alexander Knowles

did the same for his daughter. Master George Middleton saw his wife submit to the new Kirk after some considerable hesitation. But not all of those summoned did submit. Janet Maitland maintained her obstinate refusal to recognise the new Kirk, and Gilbert Menzies delayed until August 1574 when he had to face the personal presence of the regent in the burgh. The power of the Menzies family, which was obviously strong even on the session, was enough to protect its members who retained their Catholic sympathies.

By the time the regent arrived in the burgh, the fire of the Protestant party was more or less exclusively concentrated on the Menzies family, the other pockets of Catholicism having been sufficiently dealt with or forced underground. The records of the proceedings against the various members of the Menzies family reveal what is in essence a Catholic household enjoying almost the status of a domestic church or parish.¹⁶⁶ In September 1574, soon after Morton's departure from the town, the session attempted to deal with the minority of Catholics who stood out against the new settlement; Janet Maitland and her sons and daughters together with the three sons of Gilbert Menzies of Coull, were ordered to come once more and submit to the Kirk. In other words the net of conformity was being tightened: it was no longer sufficient for the head of a household to subscribe to the Confession of Faith on behalf of his dependents - the whole family was required to submit.¹⁶⁷ A week after the summons Gilbert Menzies undertook that his family would adhere to the new Kirk, and the sons of Gilbert Menzies of Coull also conformed. This was a notable victory for the Protestant party; the most powerful family in the burgh had been humbled. The scope of the victory may be seen from the accompanying notice in the session register that leets were to be

drawn up in preparation for elections to the new session.¹⁶⁸

Once again it was proposed that Aberdeen should follow the example of other kirks in this matter, the implication being that it had not done so until then largely because of the oligarchical control of the powerful burgess families. The success of this proposal for direct participation by the congregation and the cessation of the practice of self-selection by the session was seen in the composition of the new roll of elders and deacons. The influence of the sitting council was minimised. Only four members of the new session were also members of the council. Whilst not a single member of the 1574 session had, according to session lists which are extant, served on a kirk session before. The Protestant party in the burgh had good grounds for satisfaction with the visit of the regent to Aberdeen, and it had given them a strength which allowed them to press ahead with reforms which had hitherto been beyond their means to achieve.

In many ways Morton's visit to Aberdeen in the late summer of 1574 could have been counted a success for Protestantism. Much of the work in the direction of purification and clarification of the Protestant machinery and practice of the burgh had been achieved through the alliance of external pressure and the internal Protestant group within the burgh. Encouraged by John Craig, and intimidated by the presence of Morton and the privy council, the oligarchs of Aberdeen set about reluctantly dismantling the obstacles placed in the way of further reformation. Even the Menzies family, robbed of external allies and threatened at home with ruin and excommunication, was forced to give some public subscription to the new Kirk. Their power, though shaken by the regent, was not completely broken. A sign of the resilience of the old guard is clear from the elections to the 1575 session which show a reversion to the :

type of the 1573 session. Ten out of the thirteen elders on the 1575 session were members of the council, and only four of the elders had served on the 1574 session. The council was able to reassert its dominance on the 1575 session. There was only one new name amongst the elders, Alexander Rutherford, whose father had been one of the bailies who had been ordered to ensure proper religious discipline in his own house by the regent, but the rest were all established merchants who had regularly served on the council and on the session in previous years. Thus, once the immediate danger of the civil war and the regent's revenge had passed there was a resurgence of the conservative interest in the burgh which was not to be so easily displaced.¹⁶⁹

By the end of 1574 drastic changes had been wrought within the burgh of Aberdeen. The previous fourteen years had seen three visitations by central government; the first bringing about the fall of the fourth earl of Huntly, the second the purge of King's College in 1569, and the third the partial eclipse of the Menzies family and their enforced adherence to the new Kirk. Gradually the area for conservative manoeuvre was being whittled away and the foundations of Protestantism within the burgh were being strengthened. At the close of the year Aberdeen had established the framework of a stable reformed system of discipline. Under the guidance of John Craig and with the support of central government and local sympathisers, it was to be hard for the conservative faction in the burgh to regain their former position of absolute dominance. Morton had proved in 1574 that even the kirk session could act as a restraint, a goad or a focus of opposition to the town council. The session was an alternative representative body allowing a way in to public life for the professionally and economically secure but not enormously wealthy merchants. The

question of religion was not settled in Aberdeen in 1574, but its boundaries became more clearly delineated. Over the next twenty years the cause was to be taken a step further, and chiefly by men who had to struggle to find a voice in the council chamber. The religious opinions, professional expertise and intellectual formation of these men encouraged them to find an alternative rallying cry and means of expression for their opinions.

Morton's visit in 1574 was the first serious blow the Menzies had suffered since their dispute with the earl of Huntly in the 1540s.¹⁷⁰ The regent's firmness, together with the issues on which he chose to fight, namely the kirk session and its use as a focus of opposition, as well as the threat of financially oppressive measures which hit the burgesses in their pockets, showed clearly the advantages to be gained in future by judicious exploitation of such methods. 1574 also marked a significant point in the development of the Catholic community in the north-east. It is another stage in the withdrawal of Catholicism to the relatively private world of recusancy. Until 1574 Catholicism, albeit in the form of survivalism rather than missionary endeavour, had maintained a high profile in the burgh and represented a viable alternative to the established Kirk. After 1574 it was forced to adopt a less public face, and as the number of former priests died out and were not replaced by missionary priests trained abroad, the sacramental life on which Catholicism rested for its identity and strength was seriously threatened and starved of vigour. The character of Catholicism in the years after 1574 was marked by a sense of decline and insecurity, and its strength in the burghs suffered accordingly.

1. TA, xii, p. 210.
2. CSP Foreign Eliz., 1569-71, no. 872.
3. Donaldson, James V to James VII, p. 164.
4. Wormald, Lords and Men in Scotland, p. 139.
5. Council Register of Aberdeen, i, p. 366.
6. G.W.S. Barrow, 'The Idea of Freedom in Late Medieval Scotland', Innes Review, xx (1979), pp. 16-34.
7. Donaldson, James V to James VII, p. 164.
8. CSP Scot., iii, no. 374.
9. CSP Foreign Eliz., 1569-71, no. 1570.
10. CSP Scot., iii, no. 382.
11. CSP Scot., iii, no. 410.
12. CSP Scot., iii, no. 429.
13. CSP Scot., iii, no. 438.
14. CSP Scot., iii, no. 443.
15. Wormald, Lords and Men in Scotland, p. 117.
16. A.L. Murray, 'Huntly's rebellion and the administration of justice in north-eastern Scotland 1570-1573', Northern Scotland, iv (1981), p. 1.
17. Murray, 'Huntly's rebellion', p. 3.
18. Murray, 'Huntly's rebellion', p. 5.
19. CSP Scot., iii, no. 2967.
20. TA, xii, p. 248.
21. CSP Scot., iii, no. 345.
22. RSS, vi, 556.
23. CSP Scot., iii, no. 358.
24. CSP Scot., iii, no. 404.
25. CSP Scot., iii, no. 427.
26. CSP Scot., iv, nos. 383, 384.
27. TA, xii, pp. xii, pp. 169, 331, 363, 364.
28. Wormald, '"Princes" and the regions', pp. 65-6.
29. BUK, i, p. 134.
30. BUK, i, p. 139.
31. Accounts of the Collectors of Thirds of Benefices, 1561-1572, ed. G. Donaldson (Scottish History Society, 1931-2), p. 220.
32. BUK, i, p. 153.
33. BUK, i, p. 153.
34. BUK, i, p. 201; Thirds of Benefices, pp. 224-7.
35. RPC, ii, p. 297.
36. TA, xii, pp. viii, 363.
37. CSP Scot., iv, nos. 383, 384.
38. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxviii, fo. 765.
39. CSP Scot., iii, nos. 288, 290.
40. CSP Scot., iii, nos. 296, 299, 305.
41. CSP Scot., iii, nos. 299, 305.
42. Wormald, Lords and Men in Scotland, p. 141.
43. Donaldson, James V to James VII, p. 164.
44. CSP Scot., iii, no. 299.
45. CSP Foreign Eliz., 1569-71, no. 1093.
46. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxviii, fo. 765.
47. CSP Scot., ii, no. 942.
48. Diurnal of Occurents, p. 342.
49. Brown, 'The Exercise of Power', pp. 38-9.
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CHAPTER SEVEN

The Fall of the 'Race of Menzies'.

During the last decades of the sixteenth century the boundaries of the burgh community were changing dramatically. For most of the century the burgh had formed a closed society, jealous of its privileges and zealous in its attempts to exclude local nobles and lairds from interference in its internal affairs. As the century progressed the sense of the community's self-understanding underwent development, long-established loyalties were tested, positions of power and influence were challenged, and there ensued a consequent alteration in patterns of patronage and association; each representative group within the region and the burgh was looking for new and powerful allies. The various discontented groups in the town were all looking for some kind of catalyst or rallying point during these years, a spokesman or issue which could co-ordinate opposition and increase their corporate effectiveness. Protestantism certainly provided such a platform, but many were reluctant to embrace its tenets since they shared in the general conservatism of the region. Eventually, discontent and division focussed around the question of the craftsmen's rights to representation on the council. The underlying issue was however, the coherence of the community, and the loyalty of those who governed it to traditional values.

The interests involved in the troubles of the 1580s and 1590s were kaleidoscopic in pattern, but can be resolved into a number of broad categories. The division between town and country, always difficult to maintain, was being slowly eroded, threatening the continuance of Aberdeen as a distinct local community with its independent representative structures, and tradition of overseas trading, and, consequently, its direct relationship to the crown was jeopardised. The local nobility had not been strong enough to subdue the burgh from without, but its subversion from within was almost in process of being accomplished through

the absorption of its governing class of burgesses into the ranks of the rural clientage of the earl of Huntly. The volume and variety of foreign trade declined as the burgess lairds became less involved with it. Fewer of them seemed inclined to go to sea or even to maintain shares in shipping, being content at times to buy from the market of other major Scottish towns which were doing an increasing trade in luxury goods.¹ The effect on the port of Aberdeen was starvation of business, and discontent amongst the less well-off burgesses and many of the craftsmen.

The place of religious conviction in the controversy between the various section of burgh society is difficult to define. Whereas the association of Thomas Menzies of Pitfoddels with Catholicism had been positive, discreet, and never openly challenged in the burgh, the Catholic sympathies of other members of his family, including his two sons who succeeded him as provost, was public and vocal.² Apart from its devotional and theological attractions Catholicism offered an implicit respect for the hereditary principle and the customary values of heritage and lineage. With the development of Protestantism however these long-accepted values were subjected to religious test. Civic responsibility, honour and power were to be determined by nobility of virtue measured against the standard of obedience to the Word of God.³ In effect, the concepts of honour and lineage had to be expanded to accommodate the vocal and increasingly powerful professional classes, particularly the lawyers. The religious differences between the various parties in Aberdeen were not the motive force, but rather the expression of differing social and political philosophies. Over the years Protestantism had grown stronger in the burgh, and the limited potential of the kirk session as an alternative representative body had been fully exploited. The confidence of the political reformers, who also included a number of

convinced Protestants within their ranks, had increased since the first faltering beginnings of the Reformation in 1560. Their challenge to the conservatism of the burgh's governing coalition came when Catholicism was in the midst of a weak and transitional phase between the last remnants of survivalism and the initial impulses of the Jesuit-led Scottish mission.

By the end of the 1580s Catholicism had completed its transformation from a public kirk to the privy kirk. This transition was marked by a retreat into the household. The old Catholic clergy, who had been admitted to serve household communities, were dying out. Their heirs were the Jesuit missionaries whose activity was peripatetic and directed more to a noble clientele. The urban Catholic communities were ministered to with increasing irregularity, and were increasingly exposed to a rising and more confident burgh Protestantism. In the face of such a threat, influential Catholic burgesses drew closer politically to those powerful local nobles whose opinions they broadly shared. It is against this background that the conflict between the council and the craft guilds was to be played out.

The principal target of the craft assault was the 'abominable race of Menzies',⁴ with their kinship network, local landed colleagues and burgess associates. In many ways similar complaints had been levelled by David Menzies against Provost Sir John Rutherford in 1487. It was maintained that the Menzies were sustained in office by an unrepresentative and self-perpetuating oligarchy with neither interest in, nor sympathy for, the broad mass of the burgh's population. As the Menzies were at the head of opposition in 1487, so they were the focus of it in the 1580s and 1590s. Similarly, as in 1525 John Collison had encouraged and allowed greater participation in the burgh's affairs by local lairds, and had been

denounced for his pains as an 'ambesowus proud man', so at the end of the century Thomas Menzies was to follow a related policy and provoke equal resentment.⁵ Menzies' motive was not simply, or even primarily, ambition, but an identification of political and social interests informed by religious conservatism.

The Menzies' role as mediators between central and local government, forming the fulcrum on which national and urban interests turned, enabled them to short-circuit any opposition movement seeking allies at court. The negative aspect of this function was their exceeding vulnerability should they lose their skills, fail to satisfy the expectations of those they represented, or be outmanoeuvred by an alternative coalition of interests with direct access to powerful figures in the central administration. This is precisely what happened in the dispute with the craftsmen.

The pre-eminence of the Menzies within the burgh was being undermined for some time before the crisis of the 1580s and 1590s came to a head. In many ways they were reaping the harvest of the previous fifty years during which the Menzies, like many of the other leading families in Aberdeen, had embarked on a process of 'gentrification'. The determined acquisition of landed estates outside the burgh had been continuing since the fourteenth century and had gathered pace by the sixteenth.⁶ It had been so successful by 1590 that Master John Cheyne was able to describe Master Thomas Menzies of Pitfoddels the provost as 'an landward barron, na merchant nor traffecker, only brought from landward, for the maintenance of his friends ...'.⁷ Throughout the sixteenth century the long cherished distinction between town and country was becoming increasingly blurred. This movement was accompanied by an equivalent convergence of view between the dominant members of the council, and the local nobility with their gentry clientage. This was a grave cause of anxiety to those

less powerful merchant burgesses and the wealthier members of the craft guilds, who, excluded from the council, saw themselves at the mercy of an administration whose main concern was their position in landed society. Their care for the economic and political well-being of the burgh often appeared secondary to this major interest.

There are signs that the effectiveness of the administrative machinery in the burgh was declining throughout the 1580s. The general withdrawal of the leading burgesses from full involvement in the government of the burgh coincided with an increase in the pressure of administration. In 1585 it was decided that henceforth bailies should serve only one year of office instead of several as the custom had been in the past.⁸ This proposal was accepted, less out of consideration for the dangers of oligarchy, than a concern that the increasing burdens of government were falling too heavily on the shoulders of the same people, distracting them from their other business. Similarly, there seems to have been difficulty from time to time in enforcing the decisions of the bailie court. There were instances of open defiance of the regulations of burgh and guild: a goldsmith, James Robertson, was arraigned in 1584 for continuing the exercise of his craft despite his being a free burgess of guild, and, even earlier in 1578 John Duquharis the cordiner, had continued making shoes even though he had been deprived of the freedom of his craft.⁹ By 1590 the matter of law-enforcement was giving rise to such serious concern that it was stipulated that in future the bailies would choose the town sergeants, who had hitherto been elected at the Michaelmas Head court.¹⁰ The actual power of the oligarchy had been under strain for some years before the crisis actually came to a head in 1587.

Another sign of the failure of the Menzies to exercise the burgess equivalent of good lordship was the increasing difficulty in offering

patronage. In 1586 William Kinloch was admitted as master of the Sang School by the provost and council. Kinloch appears to have been a Catholic sympathiser, since a minority on the council objected to his appointment on the grounds that he was 'suspect of his religioun' and had not conformed to the acts of Parliament. Whereas in previous years the Menzies might have been able to force the appointment through, as they had in other cases of patronage offered to Catholics, they were forced to concede in Kinloch's case and the appointment was never effective.¹¹ By the 1590s more and more direct challenges were issued to the Menzies on the matter of control of patronage.

One of the most significant disputes over patronage concerned the office of common clerk of the burgh, an office which had been held simultaneously with the provostship by the Menzies family for three generations. In 1588 the office fell vacant through the death of Gilbert Menzies of Coull.¹² Normally it would have passed without question to his brother and successor, Master Thomas Menzies. However, objections were raised to the combination of the offices of provost and clerk, and to the Menzies continued possession of the clerkship in 'kindly tenancy'. On this occasion the leading family's opponents were found amongst the bailies. By the end of the 1580s a sizeable opposition party existed within the burgh; its membership was not confined to the ranks of the craftsmen but was to be found in the heart of the burgh administration. The strength of the council in the past had lain in its exclusivity and permanence; faction and controversy had been contained by agreements made within the council chamber, so that a common front could be presented to the rest of the burgh. Essentially direction of affairs had fallen to the smaller burgh cabinet of the provost, bailies and Dean of Guild. Various complaints had been made over the years that meetings were not

always publicly announced, councillors summoned in good time, or business manipulated. No lists of attenders of meetings were compiled and there was no general access to the registers of council meetings.¹³ The clerkship became an important issue under such circumstances. The Menzies seem to have appropriated a large part of the town's documents and were not persuaded to release them until 1592.¹⁴ Without such documentation it was impossible for the opposition to pursue their investigations into the maladministration of the burgh's finances or pursue their case in the central courts of justice.

One of the principal causes of complaint in the burgh had been the increasing political and economic identification between the merchant oligarchy and the local gentry and nobility. The Menzies seemed to be abandoning the degree of distance which had been traditionally maintained between the two parties to preserve the burgh's freedom. During the 1580s and 1590s, just as more burgesses were carving out a role for themselves amongst the lairds, so were the lairds attempting to establish themselves in the town. The Menzies not only allowed but seemed to encourage this process. The process of association began with proportionate increase of the members of the gentry clientage of the Gordons in the ranks of the burgesses of Aberdeen. A fairly significant gesture of goodwill was made by the council in May 1582. The earl of Huntly along with forty-one of his principal retainers drawn from his local affinity were admitted to the freedom of the burgh.¹⁵

It had been the consistent policy of the burgesses to restrict representation on the council to merchants actually engaged in trade and living in the burgh. The Menzies, who had been constant defenders of this principle, were the first to break it. In October 1579 Leslie of Balquhain and his kinsman James Leslie were admitted to serve on the council.¹⁶

They were joined in 1583 by Captain Thomas Kerr, another Huntly supporter.¹⁷ The Menzies' encouragement of this process stemmed from their own ideological isolation within the town. In order to preserve their traditional position in burgh life they were forced to undermine the foundation on which that position was constructed. Both Gilbert Menzies of Pitfodells and Master Thomas Menzies of Durno his brother, had been strong members of the conservative lobby in the town during the civil war, and both had been condemned by the Kirk Session for their refusal to subscribe to the Confession of Faith.¹⁸ In 1568 both of them had joined with the fifth earl of Huntly in subscribing to a bond in defence of the queen.¹⁹ This association with the conservatives had continued and was combined with the general process of withdrawal and isolation from public life experienced by many contemporary Catholics. The Catholicism of the Menzies family was not the cause of, but a contributory factor to, their alienation from popular opinion within the burgh. Their isolation led them to seek external allies to compensate for their internal exposure to attack. Not unnaturally they looked to the most powerful local magnate, the earl of Huntly and his client families, to shore up their diminishing strength in the burgh.

The Menzies were already part of the conservative and Catholic north-eastern network; expediency as well as natural attraction drew them in the direction of the earl of Huntly. The sixth earl saw himself, and was recognised by his contemporaries, as the chief hope of those who retained Catholic sympathies. When the troubles between the Menzies and their opponents were beginning, Huntly had recently returned from France, where he had completed a Catholic education.²⁰ Immediately he set about restoring the place Gordon power had enjoyed in the north-east during the time of his grandfather, the fourth earl. The sixth earl's ambitions

were utterly traditional and totally in accord with the age-old policies of his house. For over a century the Gordons had sought to enforce their position as royal lieutenants in the north by constructing a network of local alliances. The fourth earl had developed this practice fully in a series of bonds of manrent with the Highland chieftains on whose cooperation and submission his power rested. His grandson followed his example enthusiastically. From 1585 onwards he entered into bonds of manrent with most of the prominent Highland chieftains, the McGregors, McKenzies, Grants of Freuchy, Lauchlan Mackintosh of Dunnachten and the Clan Macpherson. His ability to 'deliver' the north and fulfil the function delegated to him by the crown rested on this tapestry of political association. Any threat to it was ruthlessly countered. Huntly was well aware of the conventions of 'good lordship' since without them he would have ended in the political wilderness. The importance of the alliance system is clearly seen in his fatal quarrel with the earl of Moray in 1592. The dispute is directly traceable to Moray's attempts to undermine Huntly's local power by drawing into his own affinity families like the Mackintoshes and the Grants who had been dependent on Huntly.²¹ At the beginning of the 1580s both Huntly and the Menzies were looking for allies, and each had something positive to offer the other. But, if the sixth earl's ambitions were reminiscent of his grandfather's there was one notable difference. The fourth earl had failed markedly in including the burgh of Aberdeen within his clientage and his principal opponents had been the Menzies family. In the 1580s the sixth earl was to succeed in this regard: this time with the Menzies as his allies. His success was to be short-lived since the Menzies did not long survive the conclusion of the alliance.

The inclusion of prominent members of the Gordon affinity in the

governing body of the town was not only a sign of increasing identification of view between the Menzies and the earl of Huntly but was also an indication of the poverty of the Common Good. Thomas Kerr's admission to the council seems to have been the response to the part he played in Edinburgh in ensuring that the town should be granted the properties of the Carmelite and Dominican friaries.²² By the 1580s admission to freedom of the burgh, or even to membership of the council, was soon the only distinction that could be offered to those who had performed some service to the town. Even this proved inadequate in the long term and the burgh was forced to dig deeper into its remaining endowments to come up with suitable inducements for support. In 1591, soon after Master John Cheyne had launched a major attack on the Menzies family in the Convention of Royal Burghs held in Aberdeen, the council broke with all precedent and agreed to feu the lands of Ardlair to the Leslie of Balquhain.²³ The Leslies had been attempting to acquire these lands for decades and the council had consistently refused in order not to seem to take sides in any dispute between the Leslies and the Forbes, who also wished to add them to their domain.²⁴ Their grant to the Leslies shows the significance of the change that had taken place, and the alteration in the council's attitude to the neighbouring gentry.

In 1587 an attempt was made to forestall possible gentry interference in the electoral process by the emphatic re-statement of the statute restricting the eligibility for election to the burgh office to merchants and indwellers of the town. Although the council registers for 1587 record no dispute over the election to the provostship yet two further sources suggest that there was such a conflict, and that it ended in compromise between the two opposing parties. In his chronicle, Walter Cullen, the town's reader and a contemporary observer of the events

in question, stated that Alexander Rutherford was elected provost 'and that be the switt rowe, ewry man gettin his woitt, and sworin to byd at sayne; and thairefter the cunsall, be perswasioun of my Lord Huntly, was content with sertan of the commonds that Gilbert Menzes suld be continewitt in his office for that yeir allanerly'.²⁵ In his submission to the Convention of Burghs in 1590, Master John Cheyne gave some idea as to the strength of pressure applied by Huntly and the quarter from which his support derived. Cheyne placed the responsibility for the 1587 election squarely on the shoulders of Menzies' supporters amongst the landward barons.²⁶ However, the account of the 1586 election given by Cullen implies that the Menzies had already lost a great degree of popular support. During the course of that election a minor constitutional change was made. Normally the provost was elected by the 'switt rowe', although very often only one candidate was presented for election. In 1586 Gilbert Menzies was elected not by the 'switt rowe' but by the council alone and by 'sertane commound wottis'. On the other hand, the bailes were elected by the 'switt rowe'.²⁷ Anticipating a challenge to their authority in 1587 and realising that they no longer ruled by consensus, the Menzies took steps to bring in their allies from the surrounding countryside and to ask for the support they had been building up so assiduously over the previous years.

The election of 1587 was the beginning of the end for the Menzies' rule in Aberdeen. Their triumph on that occasion was temporary and achieved only at the cost of their permanent isolation from their fellow-townsmen. Moreover, their success was limited by the strength of opposition mounted against them. The council list for 1587 shows an influx of eight new members onto the council. Three of this group were admitted in virtue of hereditary right, but the remaining five were not part

of the Menzies lobby and were associated rather with their opponents. Amongst this larger group was Master John Cheyne, who was to lead the craftsmen's agitation during the next six years before becoming provost himself in 1593. The 1587 council has something of an air of compromise about it. Even the association with the earl of Huntly was not strong enough to enforce submission to Menzies rule in the burgh. The events leading up to the Common Indenture of 1587 had stirred up too much ill-feeling for a simple return to the political balance of the 1570s. Neither had the Indenture satisfied all of the demands of the craftsmen, its interpretation was still to be contested many years afterwards. In response to this turbulence the Menzies adopted the traditional solution, the ranks of the council were widened to admit representatives of the opposition movement in the hope that faction could be contained within the council chamber. The result was to alter dramatically the balance of the council, and to give Cheyne and his allies a bridgehead that they were quick to develop. The paradox of the situation was that although the opponents of the Menzies objected violently to the closer association of the burgh with the Gordons and their clientage, without that association they would never have gained a foothold on the council. Representation on the council was the price they demanded for acquiescing in Huntly's wish for Gilbert Menzies to continue as provost. At the elections of 1588 their position was even stronger. Master Thomas Menzies was elected to succeed his brother, this time by the use of the traditional method, 'the switt rowe'.²⁸ However, a close eye was to be kept on him by the bailies, three of whom were members of the anti-Menzies party led by John Cheyne, and all of whom had been elected only the previous year. The Menzies remained as chief magistrates but at a price.

The price demanded by the earl of Huntly was a heavy one and undid

the efforts made by several generation of Menzies in the north-east. In June 1588 Gilbert Menzies of Coull, provost of Aberdeen, and his brother Master Thomas who was to succeed him later in the year, signed a bond of manrent with the earl of Huntly at Aberdeen for themselves and their kin.²⁹ Huntly was now in the enviable position of having the provost of Aberdeen in his pocket. The compliance of the burgh of Aberdeen was an absolute necessity should Huntly's negotiations with the Spanish come within the bounds of possibility. By a skilful exercise of opportunish skills Huntly had finally achieved what his grandfather had hoped for and been denied. From 1588 onwards the relationship between the Menzies and the Gordons became closer, until in 1590 Huntly, writing to Edinburgh in defence of the Menzies' position in Aberdeen, could refer to the provost and his family as 'my dependaris'.³⁰

The Menzies' dependence on Huntly was to have confessional as well as political substance, since it was universally accepted that the Gordon network was the chief mainstay of Catholicism in the north-east. In Aberdeen there had always been a measure of tolerance, and even public support, for Catholicism and its clergy. Towards the end of the century there was increased pressure on conservative communities, stemming from a Kirk, terrified of the prospect of foreign invasion, and from a court intent on achieving the English succession for its sovereign. Apart from the shelter offered to Jesuits, and the easy availability of the mass in Old Aberdeen - both of which were common knowledge throughout the kingdom - the ministers had grave reservations about the reliability of King's College.³¹ In 1581 Parliament had expressed the hope that the college would be reformed, and in 1582 the faultlessly Calvinist Earl Marischal was appointed to a commission to visit the college. The commission appears to have produced a report on the possibility of reforming the college but

nothing came of it at that time.³² It was still difficult to plant an effective cell of godly doctrine in the heart of a Gordon settlement. Throughout the 1580s the General Assemblies lamented the situation in the north and prevailed on the king to pursue the Jesuits and their Catholic supporters more enthusiastically.³³ The discovery of the earl of Huntly's involvements in plots with Spain served only to increase their anxiety and caused them to press all the harder for severe measures against non-conformists.

The response of many of the inhabitants of Aberdeen to ecclesiastical discipline had been lukewarm. The ministers were constantly hampered in their task by the lack of support from the council, many of whose members were still conservative sympathisers. In order to preserve appearances the town statute providing for the enforcement of attendance at the sermons was reiterated at regular intervals. In 1587, again perhaps in response to the larger Protestant representation on the council, it was promulgated for the first time by the head court and re-stated in 1590.³⁴ Some of its effects were mitigated by the council appearing to allow the minimum of conformity in 1584. A statute in October of that year laid the duty of attendance at the weekday sermon only on masters of households, who were allowed to represent the rest of their family and dependents.³⁵ There were no serious attempts to impose a religious test until the exposure of the Gordon plots for foreign invasions in 1592 made such measures seem sensible precautions. In 1592 it was ordered that the free and unfree inhabitants of the town should come and give their oath of loyalty to uphold the Protestant religion because of the dangers to which it was exposed from the enemies of Christ's gospel.³⁶ It is not clear how successful this test was since another was found to be necessary in October of the same year.³⁷ Clearly pressure to expose non-conformity

was accumulating during the 1580s and early 1590s.

The role of the merchant in the preservation of the Catholic community increased as the sixteenth century progressed. Scottish Catholics were becoming more and more dependent on missionary priests trained abroad to return and serve the native communities. Such an enterprise demanded a high degree of organization involving the co-operation of merchant and sailor, just like the missionary endeavour in England.³⁸ The links between the continental seminaries and colleges, and the noble and gentry households from which the Jesuits drew their recruits, and to which they returned them as missionary priests and political agents, converged on the sea and were channelled through the ports. The north-eastern ports were indispensable to the work of the earliest Jesuit missionaries, many of whom carried out their most fruitful work in their hinterland, as the General Assembly of 1587 complained.³⁹ The Catholic merchants and councillors of Aberdeen were not burdened with a declining community of clerics, but they were benefitting from the most up-to-date pastoral and apologetic methods produced by the most vital of counter-reforming religious orders. The liveliness of the north-eastern Catholic community, stimulated by its continental contacts, allowed the continuance of a traditional view of social relationships and obligation characteristic of a conservative patriarchal society.

The Menzies association with the earl of Huntly may have alienated them still further from the burgh community, but it also had the decisive effect of tying their fortunes closely to his. From 1587 onwards their hold on burgh office was strongly affected by whether the earl of Huntly was in favour or not. Huntly's plots were also influential in the development of a portrayal of the Catholic community as an alien group representative of foreign interests aiming at the subversion of the state.

Since it was thought that Aberdeen would be in the front line of any potential invasion the opponents of the Menzies were able to depict them as dangerous to the nation as well as to the Kirk. Yet, paradoxically, it was the innate conservatism of the king, unwilling to dismantle a policy of support for the Gordons which had survived for over a hundred years, that helped the Menzies to survive as long as they did in the face of opposition from a coalition of wealthy craftsmen, ambitious lawyers, expansionist nobles and radical Protestants.⁴⁰

As early as 1586 the earl of Huntly had been corresponding with Spain about a possible expedition to Scotland. In 1587 there appears to have been a tentative plot to smuggle Spanish soldiers into Scotland in thirty empty grain ships.⁴¹ Aberdeen would have been of considerable importance should such an expedition have been mounted. The existence of the project perhaps accounts for Huntly's determination to retain Gilbert Menzies as provost, since his co-operation would have been vital. In 1589 another coup was planned, but Huntly proved unable to maintain the unity of his force which melted away when confronted by the king in person.⁴² It was precisely in circumstances such as these that the Menzies party was most exposed to the retribution of their enemies, and when the Huntly connexion would have counted most against them. The king's actions after his victory at the Brig O'Dee in 1589, when Huntly's army deserted him, convinced the opponents of the Menzies that there was no possibility of dislodging them whilst James continued to favour the Gordons. They therefore began to look elsewhere than to the king for allies.

James VI's policy in all of his dealings with the earl of Huntly and his associates was consistent. It was marked by a definite conservatism tinged with pragmatism. The Gordons were a valuable counter-balance to the radical Protestant party, and a useful bait with which to

reassure the English Catholics and alarm the English queen. James had a much surer grasp of the mechanics of royal government in the regions than his mother ever had.⁴³ He had no intention of dismantling one of the key-stones of royal government in the north-east by bringing down the earl of Huntly. The ideal replacement for Huntly existed in the person of the Earl Marischal, who believed himself to be 'second to Huntly neither in wealth nor in power'⁴⁴ and who was more than willing to exercise the earl of Huntly's function as lieutenant of the north. It was Marischal's firm Protestantism that counted against him; the king was not keen to risk the unnecessary trouble that imposing a Protestant lieutenant on a conservative province would cause. Moreover, Marischal was the Kirk's candidate for the lieutenancy. As early as 1584 there had been complaints from Protestants that Huntly had been made lieutenant in the north 'to the prejudice of the Earl Marischal and others'.⁴⁵ Even had the king wished to promote the Earl Marischal he would have been hampered by the Earl's lack of political weight in the region: the Keiths had not managed to sink their roots into the north-east in the same way as the Gordons. James very rarely called on the Earl Marischal to exercise the royal lieutenancy in the north; when he did so it was because Huntly had proved temporarily unreliable and James had nowhere else to turn.⁴⁶

It was the king's support of Huntly that broadly conditioned his attitude to the Menzies, Huntly's principal supporters in the burgh of Aberdeen. When the king entered the burgh after the Brig O'Dee in 1589 he had the ideal opportunity to limit the Menzies power, or to remove them totally from office. The burgh was accused of aiding the earl during his recent rebellion but such assistance was accepted as having been given under duress. Since the provost and his kin had entered into a bond of manrent with Huntly the king can only be thought to have agreed to a polite

fiction. James seems to have been more interested in the substantial sum that the burgh was prepared to offer in mitigation of their involvement with Huntly. The king was well aware that to remove the Menzies from office would seriously damage Huntly's power and prestige in the area and consequently endanger royal authority further. James actually went further Huntly had been restored to favour by obligingly removing the principal threat to the Gordon position in the north; the earl Marischal was sent off to Denmark to negotiate the king's marriage.⁴⁷

James's policy towards the Menzies was the same as that directed to the Gordons. He relied on strong, loyal men who could perform the tasks set them reliably and well. What the Gordons were in the north-east at large the Menzies were in Aberdeen. There was no purpose to be served by removing either from office prematurely, especially since there was no viable alternative administration. James stuck to this policy until made to abandon it by force of circumstances and changing political realities in 1593. When James was forced to take a more severe line with the Gordons it was inevitable that the Menzies should suffer too. Even Master John Cheyne, the leader of the opposition, seemed to realise this, since in October 1589, soon after Menzies was re-elected provost he applied for, and was granted, permission to live outside the burgh for three years.⁴⁸ Meanwhile he used his opportunity to win allies for the anti-Menzies cause outside the burgh, grasping that in the forthcoming struggle national issues were going to be as important as local ones.

The struggle with the merchants represented the crafts' coming of age in the burgh. Most of them had received their seals of cause between 1519 and 1534, but only in the 1580s and 1590s were they beginning to find an independent role in the polity of a reformed burgh.⁴⁹ In the years immediately after the Reformation the craft guilds had experienced a crisis

of identity. Various attempts were made to find means of expressing their distinctiveness and common function in the town. In 1562 and 1565 a number of craftsmen were prosecuted for attempting to revive the annual May celebrations, and the Robin Hood and Little John festivities which had been banned in 1555. Significantly, the leaders of the agitation in 1565 were amongst the leaders of the craft opposition in the 1580s and 1590s.⁵⁰ Attempts to create some greater degree of co-operation amongst the crafts were unsuccessful until the 1580s, when they arose in response to the attempts by the council to clamp down on the various liberties and privileges adopted without warrant by the crafts.

Aberdeen was different to other major burghs in that no craft representation was permitted on the council. Whereas in other burghs more and more craftsmen were appearing on councils; in Perth they had first featured in the 1520s and in Edinburgh were certainly present by the 1520s yet in Aberdeen the ambitions of the craftsmen could not be accommodated at an institutional level.⁵¹ Consequently, energies which might have been expended on the direction of burgh affairs, were concentrated on curtailing the oligarchical monopoly of power, which was seen as the sole obstacle to the crafts' assumption of their rightful place in the political life of the town. Their sole opportunity to express any direct influence came when representatives of the crafts participated in the election of the burgh's officers. Although such participation appeared minimal their refusal to engage in it could cause consternation and hostility amongst the burgesses of guild, and was regarded as a definite challenge to the 'community' and constitution of the burgh.

The growing self-confidence of the crafts, and their increasing sense of solidarity, prompted them to withdraw from the electoral process on two occasions during the struggle with the merchant oligarchy.

In 1582, in the midst of a bitter dispute with the council over trading privileges, the craft deacons refused to vote in the elections of the provost and bailies.⁵² Similarly in 1591, when the council decided to alter its electoral procedure by acting in accordance with the acts of parliament and allowing the old council to choose the new, the craft deacons once more refused to give their votes.⁵³ Their sense of alienation from the political processes of the burgh encouraged this programme of non-cooperation. The council was thus deprived of its claim to represent the whole community of the burgh and the dispute entered a further stage of intensity. Thus, although the craftsmen may have appeared to receive scant recognition as reflected in the political machinery of the burgh, their influence on the drift of affairs should not be underestimated.

In any authoritarian or paternalist society there is always a problem as to how dissent may be expressed within a context of obedience to the social institution that is being challenged. In Aberdeen, tightly administered by a well-established oligarchy, there were no adequate vehicles for articulating opposition, and hence no forum for the resolution of political conflict, apart from the council, and entry to it was highly restricted. The one body which might usefully have served such a purpose, the kirk session, had swiftly fallen under oligarchical control and was little more than the town council at prayer.⁵⁴ Under these circumstances the only viable civic bodies to possess their own sense of identity, and to retain some degree of independence of the council, were the craft guilds. The conflict with the merchants was of paramount importance in the development of this sense of identity, and its use as a political tool by others who, though not craftsmen, seized the craft card as an instrument of change.

Over the decades the council had actually encouraged the crafts' growth in self-consciousness. Considerable powers of self-regulation had been granted by the terms of their incorporation. The council had not only been prepared to countenance a fair degree of self-determination they had actively bolstered the authority of the deacons and supported them in the execution of their duties.⁵⁵ The officers of the craft became, to all intents and purposes, burgh officers, responsible to the council for the behaviour of their colleagues, as well as being charged with the duties of controlling apprenticeships, and regulating standards of workmanship and competition. Over the years the deacons acquired a similar hereditary character to their merchant counterparts and consolidated their position and influence. Within each craft there developed an aristocracy of craftsmen who assumed the role of natural leaders within their own communities. These wealthier craftsmen were the obvious choice as deacons of the craft. Their financial security gave them a measure of economic independence as well as the material resources to defend the craft's privileges. By the 1580s and 1590s the craft deacons were more and more reluctant to act simply as agents of the merchant oligarchy and were demanding a position within the burgh consistent with their wealth and status. In effect the burgh constitution had remained static and failed to keep pace with the development of the community; it no longer accurately represented the interest groups that composed it. It was pressure from the unrecognised 'new' men in burgh life, amongst whom the members of the craft aristocracy would have to be numbered, that was to topple the 'old' men with their conservative notions of policy and community. The removal of the Menzies family, the paramount symbols of oligarchical authority, was the means to an end, the recognition of the status of the new men in burgh society. The

craft formed an ideal incubator of dissent in the burgh during the last decades of the sixteenth-century and the seeds of discontent only required favourable conditions to germinate and foment greater discontent.

In the late 1570s and early 1580s the council began to show alarm at the number of craftsmen who were engaging in trade, contrary to the statutes and traditions of the town. In 1578 a complaint was made that a number of unfreemen were trading from the town, and even sailing abroad to Danzig and Flanders as if they were burgesses of guild.⁵⁶ The complaint was not confined to unfreemen since in May 1580 a number of free craftsmen, all of them litsters, were tried for exercising merchandise. The seriousness of the offence is reflected in the level of the fine imposed, four pounds for the first offence and one hundred pounds should it be repeated.⁵⁷ Similarly in 1581, Andrew Chalmer, a cooper, was accused of regrating and forestalling the town by sending goods to France, Flanders and other places overseas even though he was not a free burgess of guild.⁵⁸ The dramatic increase in the number of prosecutions of craftsmen engaging in merchandise during these years encompassed more than one craft guild.

The problem was so worrying that in December 1581 the council strongly re-stated the statute ordering that all craftsmen who became free of their craft and burgesses of guild must leave the practice of their trade absolutely.⁵⁹ This did not solve the problem at all, and the crafts were by this time sufficiently self-confident to begin defying the council. In February 1582 they refused to give an undertaking to be obedient to the council, stating that the bailies were not competent to try them.⁶⁰ Moreover, certain members of the crafts combined together to outmanoeuvre the council and took their case straight to the king.

The merchant oligarchy had always attempted to control the develop-

ment of factionalism, since factionalism meant vulnerability. They were quick to see that the chief danger posed to administrative stability in the town was the right of the craftsmen to association, and the increasing co-operation between the guilds. By the beginning of the 1580s the council had lost a considerable degree of influence over the craftsmen and the membership of the craft guilds. In 1579 the council forbade the deacons to admit anyone to freedom of the craft stating that this right belonged to the deans of guild, who exercised it on behalf of the town.⁶¹ This complaint was still a point of friction in 1591, by which time the crafts had gained more or less complete control over the composition of their membership.⁶² By 1581 their sense of individual identity and common solidarity was strong enough for them to be able to band together to raise a stent to defend their case before the king's courts in Edinburgh. For the first time the council found themselves responding to events rather than directing them. The burgesses of guild were in turn forced to levy a stent to oppose the craftsmen's action. The craftsmen were obviously able to dispose of large sums of money, since the amount ordered to be collected from each burgess of guild to oppose it was fixed at two shillings per week.⁶³ The council's concern was increased by the growing importance that the commissary court was assuming in the regulation of local affairs. A feature of the circumvention of the council and its jurisdiction was the frequent recourse being made to the commissary court by burgesses of guild and craftsmen.⁶⁴ The clerk of the commissary court was Master John Cheyne, who played such a prominent part in leading opposition to the Menzies.⁶⁵ Control of the burgh court was the central plank of Menzies' authority, an authority which would not long survive the erosion of the jurisdiction of its court.

Strategically the council decided on a policy of fragmentation, the solidarity of the crafts was to be broken by selective and severe punishments directed not only at the ring leaders of the agitation, but also at the weaker members of the alliance. The council attempted to prevent the crafts implementing their newly acquired privilege by sowing dissension amongst the craftsmen. In August 1581 the entire body of craftsmen was summoned to account for their contempt of tradition and good order expressed in their appeal to the king. The argument was very definitely placed in the context of novelty versus tradition, with the council upholding the cause of tradition. According to the account of the meeting in the council registers, when each craftsman was called by name, and asked to give his opinion on the matter of the new privilege, a large majority renounced it. However, a significant minority held to it, and it was from this group that subsequent opposition was to be continued into the next decade.⁶⁶

Opposition to the council was concentrated mainly in the hammermen's craft, with the armourers, goldsmiths and saddlers well to the fore. The leaders of dissent came from the wealthier branches of the guild, from trades which demanded the highest degree of capital investment. The armourers, goldsmiths, and some tailors who joined the opposition, all dealt with luxury goods designed for an affluent clientele.⁶⁷ One of the more vigorous champions of the reform of the burgh constitution, the armourer Mathew Guild, was able to amass enough wealth to educate his son Dr William Guild, who later became principal of King's College. William acknowledged his heritage by donating the former Trinitarian priory to the crafts for their use.⁶⁸ The council attempted to isolate the leadership from their constituency by imposing sanctions on the former and bringing various kinds of intense pressure on the latter. The result was another

appeal to the privy council where the corrupt practices of the oligarchy were exposed.

The leading craftsmen, who had refused to abandon the privilege confirmed by the king, complained to the privy council that their booth doors had been 'steikit up', and that the council had ordered that they should be completely ostracised within the burgh, with nobody allowed to trade with them or associate with them in any way. In the face of such pressure, Patrick Leith, an armourer, had capitulated and was restored to his freedom by the council. The remaining craftsmen, the rank and file, had been intimidated into renouncing the privilege by the threat of repressive actions against them. These were described by the craftsmen who had refused to submit as 'depauperat, perjurit, craftsmen, nethir being responsal freemen, as the saidis complainers are, nor of any voit in counsale of the said burgh'.⁶⁹ It was as a result of this repressive action initiated by the council that the focus of discontent amongst the crafts was widened to encompass an attack on the Menzies themselves. It was clear to the craft leaders that there was no prospect of improving their lot, or gaining greater weight in the burgh until the ranks of the burgh's aristocracy were opened up to them. This would not be possible whilst the Menzies retained a stranglehold on the council. The removal of the Menzies therefore became a pressing necessity, but such an eventuality could only be brought about by the co-operation of the members of the merchant guild and the gaining of allies on the council itself.

The decisive ingredient in the consolidation of the opposition movement was the emergence of a group of discontented burgesses of guild with an independent voice on the council. The pressure for reform emanating from the crafts had placed serious strain on the financial and

political resources of the oligarchy. By 1587 the council was willing to reach some sort of accommodation with the crafts in order to restore some sort of consensus to burgh politics and to protect their own position. In effect the Common Indenture of 1587 did not notably advance the position of the craftsmen, they were still bound to present candidates to the council before they were made free of the craft. The Indenture did not grant them representation on the council; the provision of two places on the council for craftsmen remained a dead letter in Aberdeen. They were allowed to have two of their number amongst the auditors of the town's accounts, but even these were to be chosen by the council from a leet of six presented to them by the crafts. The trading privileges of the crafts were acknowledged to extend only to Scottish wares within the kingdom, and the categories of wares were to be restricted to 'small goods'. Foreign trade was to continue as the sole preserve of the merchants of guild. Although the Common Indenture may have seemed as a valuable recognition of the identity and contribution of the crafts in burgh life, its interpretation, which was largely left to the council, went consistently against the crafts. The trouble was not settled and came to a head once more in the year 1590.⁷⁰

The crisis of the 1580s had begun in response to economic pressures, which were a partial consequence of the emergence of the merchant oligarchy into the world of the local gentry. Their withdrawal from the burgh, or lack of total pre-occupation with its affairs, had economic as well as political consequences. By 1590, just when the crisis between the merchants and the craftsmen was reaching its peak, a serious contraction in the level of sea-borne trade from Aberdeen was noted by the town council. At the January Guild Court, which was open to all of the members of the guildry from the richest to the poorest, a complaint was made

that certain merchants were no longer trading through Aberdeen, but were developing interests in other burghs, notably Perth, Dundee and Edinburgh. The merchants in question were described as being of the 'richest and most substantial sort'. Their neglect of Aberdeen, and the consequent fall in the number of ships using the harbour, had drastically affected the trading interests of the other less well-off merchants who stated that Aberdeen had become 'ane dry pond'.⁷¹ The merchant princes, who also formed the council, had been sheltering a large number of smaller merchants under their large trading umbrella. The fall in the number of ships sailing to Europe, ships that had previously carried the commodities of smaller merchants in any spare hold space, presented a severe threat. The merchant oligarchy were wealthy enough, and their economic interests diverse enough, to be able to withstand such a threat. Their less substantial colleagues had a great deal to fear from their defection, especially when combined with the challenge presented to the port by the increasing importance of burghs like Peterhead and Fraserburgh, with whom Aberdeen had been waging a protracted struggle.⁷² In the subsequent attacks on the council the disaffected small merchants were to be as significant as the craftsmen in agitating for constitutional reform.

The two common concerns of the various interest groups opposed to the Menzies were, firstly the increasing involvement of the local nobility and gentry in the burgh, together with the growing identification of the members of the merchant oligarchy with the landed classes. The second major anxiety was the generalised bitterness at the maladministration of the common good, and the wholesale plundering of the burgh's resources over the previous fifty years. These concerns were related, and were considerably worsened by inflationary spiral of the last decades of the sixteenth century. Those who were best insulated from the effects

of the inflation were the landowners with access to productive estates and lucrative salmon fishings. The feu duties they paid on their holdings were contributing less and less to the common good whilst the lands were producing more and more in terms of revenue. Distress and anger at the growing wealth of the gentry burgesses increased, with the alienation of the ordinary merchant burgesses who were suffering from a drop in trade out of Aberdeen.⁷³ Their alienation was evident in the limited opportunity they had for expression of opinion, namely in the election of the provost and bailies. However, the key to constitutional change in the burgh was not so much control of the provostship as representation on the council. Such an opportunity had arisen in 1587 when the Menzies had secured their position in the burgh by allowing the addition of eight new members of the council. Most of this group were representatives of those 'new' men in the burgh who found themselves in opposition to the conservatism of the Menzies family.⁷⁴

In Aberdeen, as in other burghs, there was a rising group of professional men, mostly lawyers and officials who would formerly have made their careers in the Church, which was attempting to gain some form of public scope and expression proportionate to its talents and ambitions.⁷⁵ In an essentially conservative and slow moving society, such as Aberdeen with its tightly controlled public debate which restricted discussion of policy and dissent to the council chamber, such political and economic aspirations on the part of the professions and the crafts could not be satisfied within the burgh polity as by custom established. The burgh constitution rested on the time-honoured values of lineage and privilege; merit was an added, but not necessary, qualification for status in the urban political landscape. The inevitable alliance between both sections of the discontented population, the crafts and the professions,

making common cause of essentially different concerns, won a resounding victory for merit over privilege, although merit was sanctioned and promoted by godly religion.

Once they had secured representation on the council, and were guaranteed that their opinions would achieve some sort of expression, the peculiarities of the burgh constitution actually worked in their favour. It was customary for councillors to remain in office for life, therefore their nominees could not easily be displaced by the Menzies ascendancy on the council.

The architect of the Menzies downfall was Master John Cheyne, a lawyer and former commissary clerk in Old Aberdeen.⁷⁶ His rise to power in the burgh, which culminated in his election as provost in 1593, gives a local example of a wider national phenomenon. Traditionally power went together with noble blood or ancient lineage. The Menzies family would have agreed with James VI that 'virtue followeth ofttest noble blood'.⁷⁷ In Aberdeen this assumption was to be challenged by Cheyne and his colleagues. The tension appearing nationally between the ancient families, and those whose influence stemmed from patronage achieved through diligence, natural ability and an acute sense of political realities, appears incarnated in the career of John Cheyne. Cheyne is a good example of the ambitious lawyer using his skills to create a coalition of interests designed to break open the closed society of Aberdeen, and broaden the restricted notion of community which it enshrined.

Cheyne had realised very early on in his career the potential drawing power of a campaign against the further depletion of the common good. While the demands of administration increased as the century progressed, the resources of the common good correspondingly decreased. The feu duties derived from the town's lands and fishings, as well as

burgh offices like the common clerkship which had been farmed out, were depreciating as the rate of price inflation spiralled. Soon the only regular income deposited in the common good was the entry silver derived from the merchant guild and the crafts.⁷⁸ Since the principle of heredity operated with regard to the merchant guild, and merchants' sons were admitted to freedom gratis, the crafts found themselves contributing a disproportionate amount to the common good. The decline of the common good was therefore linked in the popular mind with hereditary misappropriation of burgh funds by the oligarchy. Nepotism, corruption and speculation thus became clear targets for attack.⁷⁹ However, any attack on the merchant oligarchy was an attack on the council and the burgh constitution, since by the end of the century both were inextricably intertwined. Such an assault was by no means directed towards the eradication of privilege within the burgh. It was concerned with those who claimed the privilege without performing the service.

At the Head Court of 1588 a commission was established to oversee the administration of the common good. Cheyne, seeing his opportunity and exploiting the authority given to him and his fellow-commissioners by the burgh Head Court, interpreted it in the widest sense, and did not shrink from the resulting conflict with the Menzies.⁸⁰

The first quarrel arose over the question of the appointment of the town clerk. The death of Gilbert Menzies of Pitfoddels occurred at a most inopportune time for the Menzies interest. They were exposed to greater criticism at that time than they had been for some time previously. Their alliance with the Gordons and their growing wealth, much of it amassed at the burgh's expense, had alienated them even further from the constituency they were alleged to represent. The imposition of the 'watch-dog' body of the commission for the administration of the common

good was a necessary price to pay for an uninterrupted succession of the provostship in the Menzies family. Master Thomas Menzies was elected in September 1588 but the community, or at least a portion of it in the shape of the majority of the commission who administered the common good, were reluctant to allow him to enjoy the 'kindly tenancy' of the other offices that had remained in his family for some years previously.⁸¹ For three generations the office of town clerk had remained in the Menzies family, although the actual work had been done by a deputy in the shape of Master John Kennedy.⁸² Although a majority of the council were in favour of the succession to the clerkship going to Master Thomas Menzies, a sizeable minority, all of whom had been elected to the council the previous year as an anti-Menzies lobby, refused to consent to the grant.⁸³ The opposition was successful, by employing a constitutional manoeuvre, in consolidating a bridgehead on the council, which they skillfully exploited to undermine the conventions of burgh politics, eventually making the burgh ungovernable.

There were several points at issue in the matter of the dispute over the clerkship. Firstly the commission for the administration of the common good, and the interest they represented, were issuing a direct challenge to the hereditary principle which had come to dominate in burgh politics. Secondly they were choosing their ground most carefully by selecting an issue that would hurt only the Menzies family, and no other established family or interest in the burgh. Finally they were taking very practical steps to gain access to the records of the burgh: the records of council meetings, the history of burgh transactions with central government, the details of the extent and fate of much of the burgh property, which seem to have been kept as confidential assets for the Menzies family only.⁸⁴ Although the commissioners were unable to prevent

the Menzies from keeping control of the clerkship the relative strength of both parties was clear for all to see, and it was obvious that further assaults on hereditary privilege were to follow.

The next attempt by the commission for the administration of the common good to make their office effective was over the appointment of a commissioner to the convention of burghs in April 1589.⁸⁵ The bailies and council agreed to appoint Alexander Rutherford, the provost's nephew, as commissioner with a grant of forty-five pounds towards his expenses. The grant of expenses brought the matter within the remit of the commission for the administration of the common good, or so its members claimed. They refused to accept the nomination of Rutherford and proposed an alternative in John Cheyne.

One of the complaints made against the oligarchy was that no leets of candidates were ever presented for any office. The choice of the burgesses was therefore limited to those candidates nominated by the council. In effect the only possibility of participation in the selection process was a form of election by acclamation on the part of the burgesses.⁸⁶ This partly explains the disarray of the commissioners in the matter of an alternative candidate to Alexander Rutherford in 1589. John Cheyne was absent in Edinburgh when the choice was made, so the opposition was deprived of its tactician and point of unity.⁸⁷ In the event the commission divided with three votes in favour of George Gordon, a councillor, and the fourth member of the party proposed George Strachan. Although the disarray suffered by the opposition ensured that the day would go against them one important procedural victory was secured. It was agreed by the council that a register of all those attending meetings should be kept in future and that no decisions of importance should be taken without the names of those present being recorded.⁸⁸

During the previous dispute over the clerkship John Cheyne had attempted to standardise the voting procedures in the burgh. By the late 1580s the summoning of the community by the bell and the calling of the 'suit roll' for voting purposes had become almost extinct in Aberdeen. Cheyne had protested that whenever a vote was taken by the 'suit roll' there was still a possibility of manipulation of the result. A disproportionate influence could be gained by those whose chief interests did not lie in the burgh. Moreover, it had become customary for the provost to choose which quarter was to give its vote first in any ballot. He often chose the constituency that favoured him most, thereby influencing the result. When Cheyne demanded a ballot on the issue of the town clerkship he also requested that the Cruikit Quarter be allowed to vote first.⁸⁹ This quarter was composed of the Shiprow and the Netherkirkgate, and seems to have been a poorer area of the town. It may be that Cheyne could be more assured of support from this quarter, he was certainly better advised to look for popular support in that part of the town rather than in the better-off area of the Castlegate.⁹⁰ However, the appeal for popular support, the emergence of political discussion from the council chamber onto the streets was to be the decisive change wrought by Cheyne and his supporters. They soon discovered that an isolated group on the council was not powerful enough to displace the Menzies, but an alliance of burgesses and discontented craftsmen was potentially more powerful, especially if its platform was composed of a concerted attack on the procedural irregularities of the merchant oligarchy.

In 1590 Master John Cheyne presented a complaint from various burgesses and craftsmen of Aberdeen against the acceptance by the Convention of Burghs of Master Thomas Menzies, the provost of Aberdeen, and Alexander Rutherford as the lawfully constituted representatives of Aber-

deen, since they had not been appointed with the consent of the entire community.⁹¹ The list of complainers is significant since it provides a picture of the coalition of interests which had combined against the Menzies. Apart from Cheyne himself, there were three other councillors. The Convention marked the first appearance of deep factionalism on the council itself which had previously kept its disagreements hidden. The majority of the remainder of the complainers were drawn from the ranks of the various trades which formed the hammermen craft, especially the saddlers and the armourers, and the cooper craft. Together with the hammermen and the coopers there were a number of baxters and a sprinkling of cordiners, all of whom paid a tax contribution in 1576 which placed them in the moderately wealthy category. Some of them had been judged of sufficient respectability to serve on the kirk session; Alexander Ewan and George Laing, both of whom were prominent craftsmen had served as deacons.⁹² Most of the craft signatories of the protest to the Convention of 1590 had also served as deacons of their craft. Clearly this group represented an influential body of burgh opinion. For the first time the forces of the opposition had united and had the aspect of a viable alternative party of government. They were of sufficient influence to draw the provost and the majority of the council away to Edinburgh in September 1590 to defend themselves against charges of corruption and electoral malpractice raised against them.⁹³ The opposition party of 1590 represented a fusion of two distinct interest groups whose ambitions were related but not identical. The key to their success lay in the opportunity provided by the 1587 election to introduce non-Menzies sympathisers to the council.

The succeeding years in Aberdeen saw the strategic retreat of the merchant oligarchy from their domination of burgh affairs. What forced

this retreat was the acknowledgement that it was impossible to govern the burgh without the support of the consensus of the population. Initially, when faced with the assault of Cheyne and his colleagues on their monopoly of power, the council had attempted to adapt their constitutional practice so that it would conform to that of other burghs. They hoped to exploit the acts of Parliament in such a way that the council could continue as a self-selected body whilst preserving itself from the charge of illegality. The procedural changes were largely forced by Cheyne and his actions before the Convention of Burghs and the Court of Session. In October 1590 the council promulgated a statute stressing the value of the continuance of councils without change of personnel. However, to remain within the law and to counter some of the criticisms of their opponents, the councillors ordered that all the officers of the council should be tried one by one to see if they were worthy to continue on the council. All were found to be worthy, with one exception; Master John Cheyne was ordered to be dismissed from the council unless he agreed that no craftsman could serve on it. He refused to give such an undertaking and was deposed from the council in December of the same year, Cheyne was thus the first victim of the changes he had pressed for in electoral practice.⁹⁴ Having purged the council of the spokesman of the opposition the council then set about an intensive campaign designed to regain the initiative over the crafts. The principal result of the campaign was to consolidate the sense of corporate identity of the crafts, to re-double their determination to effect change in the town and to further isolate the council from the mass of the community.

The oligarchy were conscious of their isolation and their vulnerability. The international plots of the earl of Huntly threatened to engulf them in a cloud of royal disfavour and to force unwelcome changes

within the burgh. At the 1591 election further reforms were implemented. The council remarked that a great deal of trouble was being promoted by the 'juniors' in the burgh who were objecting to the age-old electoral customs. They therefore decided to adopt the electoral practice of other burghs whereby the old and new councils would meet together with the deacons of the crafts to draw up leets for the burgh officers.⁹⁵ In the subsequent elections some of the deacons refused to give their votes.⁹⁶ The issue had thereby developed further and could no longer be resolved by simple electoral reform. The crafts were determined to gain some share on the legislative body of the town. Their view was that the long struggle, and considerable financial expenditure on law suits, was not simply directed to expanding the limits of the merchant oligarchy. Their fears were realised when measures were promoted by the new council to suppress the office of deacon convener. Moreover, the crafts were summoned in turn to produce their charters before the council so that the extent of their privileges could be determined.⁹⁷ It was under these circumstances that violence broke out at the next elections in 1592 when the craftsmen were accused of disrupting the burgh elections by convening in arms at the house of John Cheyne.⁹⁸ The repressive measures of the council, and the determination with which the merchant oligarchy clung to power in its final years, ensured that the burgh became almost ungovernable, and that central government would have to intervene to enforce some kind of compromise solution on both parties. The council of 1592 which was chosen by the king and twelve arbiters at the request of both parties, gave almost equal representation to both interests and included two craftsmen.⁹⁹ It was clear that the Menzies could no longer hope to hold their position at the head of the oligarchy, especially once their protector, the earl of Huntly, should fall from

favour.

The king gave a clear sign of his attitude to the Menzies domination of the council in 1592. He had already confirmed the electoral practice of the burgh, which was in fact to confirm the Menzies faction in power. In January 1592 the council was acquitted of all electoral malpractice in previous years. The slate was therefore wiped clean. But in May the Court of Session ordered that in future the council should be chosen according to the acts of Parliament in every respect, preparing the way for craft representation and participation in elections and in government, something which the merchants were most unwilling to permit.¹⁰⁰ However, the decision of the Court of Session introduced the important principle of mobility into the static structure of burgh government. Under these circumstances it became possible for the council to be almost totally renewed within two years. Certainly the opposition was sure of a larger voice in the administration. The disputed election of 1592 was the last attempt by the Menzies oligarchy to restrict change. The king's decretal arbitral of January 1593 ensured that they would not survive another election with their power intact. At the 1593 election Cheyne was easily elected to the office of provost. His first action was to ask the whole community to give him a vote of confidence; all present held up their hands signifying that the consensus that the Menzies had once commanded had now swung behind their chief opponent.¹⁰¹ The notion of the community was to be reconstructed on alternative lines to those that had prevailed for the previous half century.

Throughout 1593 the spectre of Spanish invasion and the suspected treachery of the earl of Huntly dominated events both nationally and locally. The affair of the 'Spanish Blanks' had been uncovered in the last days of December 1592, and this discovery formed the background to

the king's imposition of a compromise council on Aberdeen, with the Menzies family and their supporters comprising only about one third of the council, their opponents making up another third, and neutral councillors the remainder. Pressure had been mounting on the king to bridle Huntly's power, he therefore made a start in Aberdeen by undercutting one of the pillars of his local network of influence. Once again an alternative to Huntly as lieutenant of the north was available in the shape of the Earl Marischal. Marischal already enjoyed some support from the anti-Menzies lobby; John Cheyne had been an associate of his and had acted as his agent in the burgh on occasion.¹⁰² Marischal, with his impeccable Calvinist credentials, was a clear favourite of the Protestant party who had long been anxious at the degree of conservatism and even open Catholicism in the north-east. Just as the earl of Huntly's power had been founded on his commission of the lieutenancy in the north, so it was believed that Marischal's appointment to the same office would boost his influence in the region. Certainly the new regime in the burgh showed itself willing to co-operate with the new lieutenant and encouraged the foundation of Marischal College as a seminary for the provision of the Protestant preachers the region so desperately needed if godliness and reformed learning were to prosper there.¹⁰³ In effect there was to be no constitutional revolution in Aberdeen; the system remained intact save that the leading actors were different and the script was now to be moderately Protestant rather than conservatively Catholic. However, the Cheyne régime was to discover the force of the same reality that had been imposed on the Menzies family; it was impossible to govern the burgh without the consensus of its inhabitants. The radicalisation of the crafts and the breaking open of the oligarchy was to prove a mixed blessing to the burgh and introduce

the unpredictable element of religion blended with ambition.

1. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxii, fos. 622, 637.
2. See above pp. 285-6.
3. James, 'English Politics and the Concept of Honour', p. 11.
4. RPC, iv, p. 533; Burghs Conv. Recs., i, p. 313.
5. Council Register of Aberdeen, i, p. xxxiv n. 2.
6. Ewan, 'The burgesses of fourteenth-century Scotland', pp. 183-4.
7. Burghs Conv. Recs., i. p. 314.
8. Council Register of Aberdeen, ii, p. 57.
9. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxi, fo. 305; xxix, fo. 474.
10. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxiii, fo. 791.
11. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxii, fos. 54-5; Council Register of Aberdeen, ii, p. 60.
12. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxii, fos. 443, 452-7.
13. Burghs Conv. Recs., i, p. 312.
14. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxiv part 1, fo. 395.
15. New Spalding Misc., i, pp. 77-8.
16. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxix, fo. 572.
17. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxi, fo. 212.
18. SRO, RH3/20 fos. 40, 46.
19. Spalding Misc., iv, pp. 156-7.
20. Scots Peerage, iv, p. 541.
21. Wormald, Lords and Men in Scotland, pp. 117-21.
22. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxi, fo. 285.
23. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxiii part 2, fo. 992.
24. Council Register of Aberdeen, i, p. 152.
25. Spalding Misc., ii, p. 59.
26. Burghs Conv. Recs., i, p. 314.
27. Spalding Misc., ii, p. 58.
28. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxii, fo. 260; Spalding Misc., ii, p. 59.
29. Spalding Misc., iv, p. 240.
30. Taylor, Aberdeen Council Letters, i, p. 49.
31. BUK, ii, pp. 716-17.
32. Henderson, The Founding of Marischal College, p. 15.
33. BUK, ii, pp. 716-17; RPC, v, p. 46.
34. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxii, fo. 559; xxxiii part 1, fo. 797.
35. Council Register of Aberdeen, ii, p. 54.
36. Council Register of Aberdeen, ii, p. 77.
37. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxiv part 2, fo. 583.
38. Bossy, 'The character of Elizabethan Catholicism', p. 47.
39. BUK, ii, pp. 716-19.
40. Burghs Conv. Recs., i, p. 313.
41. CSP Spanish, iv, no. 149.
42. Donaldson, Scotland: James V to James VII, p. 189.
43. See above pp. 210-24.
44. Henderson, The Founding of Marischal College, p. 77.
45. Calderwood, History, iv, p. 250.
46. Henderson, The Founding of Marischal College, p. 77.
47. RPC, iv, p. 396.
48. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxii, fo. 588.
49. E. Bain, Merchant and Craft Guilds, a History of the Aberdeen Incorporated Trades (Aberdeen, 1887), pp. 198, 216, 238, 265, 306.
50. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxv, fo. 588.
51. Lynch, Edinburgh and the Reformation, pp. 49-52.

52. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxx, fo. 722.
53. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxiv part 1, fo. 3.
54. See below pp. 291 ff.
55. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxix, fo. 16.
56. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxix, fo. 474.
57. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxx, fo. 74.
58. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxx, fo. 528.
59. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxx, fo. 568.
60. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, fo. 615.
61. Council Register of Aberdeen, ii, p. 34.
62. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxiii part 2, fo. 1105.
63. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxx, fos. 620-1.
64. Council Register of Aberdeen, ii, p. 42.
65. RSS, viii, 1156, 2395.
66. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxx, fos 492, 494.
67. S. Thrupp, The Merchant Class of Medieval London(1300-1500) (Chicago, 1948), p. 6.
68. Bain, Merchant and Craft Guilds, p. 143.
69. RPC, iii, p. 482.
70. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxiii, fo. 788.
71. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxi, fo. 622.
72. Council Register of Aberdeen, ii, p. 10.
73. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxi, fo. 637.
74. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxi, fo. 260.
75. J. Wormald, 'James VI: New Men for Old?', Scotia, ii (1978), p. 74.
76. RSS, viii, 1156, 2395.
77. Wormald, 'New Men for Old?', p. 73.
78. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxix, fo. 880; xxx, fo. 8.
79. Spalding Misc., iii, pp. 150-165.
80. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxi, fo. 401.
81. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxi, fos. 443, 452-7, 459.
82. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, fos. 442, 452.
83. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxi, fo. 455.
84. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxiv part 1, fo. 395;
Burghs Conv. Recs., i, p. 313.
85. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxi, fo. 490.
86. Burghs Conv. Recs., i. p. 313.
87. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxi, fo. 490.
88. Ms. Council of Aberdeen, xxxi, fo. 490.
89. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxi, fo. 455.
90. Taylor, Aberdeen Council Letters, i, p. xx.
91. Burghs Conv. Recs., i, p. 312.
92. Spalding Misc., ii, pp. 57, 64.
93. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxi, fo. 788.
94. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxiii part 2, fo. 898.
95. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxiv part 1, fo. 1.
96. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxiv part 1, fo. 3.
97. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxiii part 2, fo. 1293;
xxxiv part 1 fo. 35.
98. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxiv part 1, fo. 517.
99. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxiv part 1, fo. 550.
100. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxiv part 1, fo. 510.
101. Ms. Council Register of Aberdeen, xxxiv, part 1, fo. 1.
102. Council Register of Aberdeen, ii, p. 119.
103. Henderson, The Founding of Marischal College, p. 80.

CONCLUSION

The recognition of the presbyterian polity in 1592,¹ the defeat of the northern earls by the king in February 1593, and the establishment of Marischal College in April of the same year, gave much encouragement to those striving to implement the seeds of Protestantism in the largely hostile environment of Aberdeen and the north-east. Those working for the cause of reformation had battled constantly against the inertia of conservatism in the region. In this struggle they were hampered by their own failure to gain absolute control of the religious, political and educational institutions to be found there. In the face of any serious external threat, the conservative members of such bodies closed ranks in self-defence. Even the attack on the Catholic staff of King's College in 1569 failed to issue in a wholesale purge. A few members of the former staff remained in the college to influence what was, in theory at least, a Protestant academy. Conservative opinions might be deplored, but they could not be wisely ignored. Those high in authority could make laws and formulate policies, but in the end what counted was the confidence and co-operation of those lower down in the hierarchy, upon whom the execution of such laws and policies fell. On a number of occasions this fundamental truth was brought home to those wishing to eradicate northern conservatism, without totally undermining the foundations of northern society. In the years after 1560 successive governments sought, in the absence of any reliable confessional commitment on the part of those who governed the region, to create viable alternative agents of policy. Hitherto they had all failed; the events of 1593 offered some hopes for success.

From many viewpoints Aberdeen should not have offered too formidable an obstacle to Protestant penetration. It lived in the shadow

of a great territorial earldom, whose virtual army of client gentry posed a regular threat to the integrity and independence of the burgh. The ambitions of the earl of Huntly to total domination of the region were supported by considerable wealth, and were often encouraged by royal favour and indulgence. For several decades Aberdeen had attempted to distance itself from the earl, and to escape absorption into his empire. One of the most effective and easily recognisable forms of differentiation was confessional. A consistently conservative and Catholic Gordon polity could not be confused with a Protestant, if not necessarily radical burgh. A more enthusiastic policy of Protestantisation would have been a useful counter in gaining the confidence of central government. Aberdeen had always relied on its relationship with central government to defend it in its frequent conflicts with external enemies. None of these advantages were positively seized by the council of Aberdeen; instead they chose the path of reluctant Protestantisation combined with crypto-Catholicism. Such an option did not fail to add to the complexities of local politics, whilst simultaneously providing any party finding itself opposed to the urban patricians of Aberdeen with an invaluable weapon and useful rallying cry. However, the burgess solidarity and communal self-assurance developed in the burgh's struggle for independence from the local nobility and gentry, stood . it in good stead in warding off the incursions of committed Protestantism in later years.

One of the principal determinants of the character of local religion was the ecclesiastical settlement of Old Aberdeen. Once again certain conditions prevailed there which, in other circumstances, might have proved favourable to Protestant expansion. The university

had been a strong centre of humanistic interest and activity, but in many ways its great days were passed and, as an academic institution, it was in decline. It had not been without influence in the movement for Catholic reform, both within the diocese and beyond its bounds. Although the level of religious practice and clerical morals reflected the general pattern of those elsewhere in Scotland, the pattern of doctrinal orthodoxy was not averse to the possibility of change. In equivalent urban centres abroad the change from reforming Catholic to reformed Protestant was neither unknown nor unusual.² A number of those who were involved in the work of Catholic reform in Scotland before the Reformation appear to have made the transition to ministry in the reformed Kirk with comparative ease.³ Yet King's College manifested determined resistance to the doctrines of the Reformation, and many of its doctors were to prefer deprivation of their benefices, excommunication, and even exile, to conformity. The attempt to supplant the influence of the college by the creation of an alternative Protestant body within the same institutional structure was only semi-successful.

The key-stone of the Protestant college was its principal, Alexander Arbuthnot, who commanded the confidence of his fellow-Protestants without unduly threatening his former Catholic colleagues. James Melville described Arbuthnot as notable for his 'sweetness of nature', as well as for his godliness and learning.⁴ Arbuthnot was quite familiar with continental patterns of education, and with Andrew Melville's schemes for the reform of the Scottish universities.⁵ James Melville claimed that the pattern of the projected Nova Erectio of King's College in 1583 had been the subject of a discussion between Andrew Melville and Arbuthnot as early

as 1575.⁶ Despite their having been in contact again in 1579 nothing appeared to come of the initiative until 1583. It is perhaps significant that the General Assembly of 1583 should have expressed some anxiety that reform of the curriculum had not been initiated at King's.⁷ In the interval between the establishment of a commission of visitation to investigate the college with a view to changes being made, Arbuthnot and Smeaton, the principal of Glasgow, both died. Their deaths were seen by Spottiswoode and others, as unfortunate events presaging some crisis within the Kirk.⁸ Despite a scheme being drawn up for King's which was noticeably influenced by the Melvillian formula constructed for Glasgow in 1577, nothing was done; once again the Assembly, in the face of determined conservatism and the absence of local collaborators, was powerless to force a resolution of the problem. The opportunity for change came only in 1593 when Huntly's power was low, the Menzies had lost their influence on the council, and an associate of the Earl Marischal's, John Cheyne, held the office of provost.

There can be no doubt but that the Marischal College scheme was in some sense an 'alternative' to King's College. The assertion in the Foundation Charter that the education of the young was everywhere deficient in the north of Scotland, was not a chance statement. The proposals for the Nova Erectio of King's College in 1587, in which the Earl Marischal was directly involved, had a bearing on the plan for the foundation of Marischal College.⁹ The earl was careful to preserve the integrity of his institution and to shield it from interference from the still strong, of slightly less vocal, conservative lobby in the town by reserving the right of presentation of all teachers to himself and his successors.¹⁰ This exclusion

rankled with a substantial number of the councillors of Aberdeen, who were content to countenance the foundation of a 'Toun College', but reluctant to concede the government of such an institution to a local noble, no matter how powerful or godly.¹¹ Marischal was shrewd enough to realise that the effectiveness of his foundation, and its role as an alternative academic institution, demanded the exclusion of the council. He was also politically ruthless enough to seize the opportunity offered by his own lieutenancy of the north to place the college on secure and independent foundations.

By founding his college Marischal was fulfilling the role which had long been cast for him by radical Protestants. In acting this part he was careful to maintain his own freedom of manoeuvre; he was by no means the imprudent instrument of Andrew Melville and his supporters. His sojourn abroad, and his studies in Calvin's Geneva, may have equipped him for Protestant service at home but they did not make him into a wholehearted supporter of radical Protestantism. Nevertheless, successive General Assemblies were happy to use him in projects and purposes which, in other circumstances, they would willingly have conceded to the earl of Huntly.

Marischal and Huntly were both relatively young men in the 1580s. Both were eager to make their mark in local society and to win royal favour. At the beginning of the 1580s they had returned to Scotland after absences abroad, during which their respective, and confessionally opposed educations had been completed. Scotland at the beginning of the 1580s seemed ripe for the development of alternative agents of government who would execute alternative policies. Not only was the national power structure beginning to shift as the king came closer to reaching his majority, but

the local patterns of authority were showing increasing signs of strain. The dispute between the earl of Huntly and the earl of Moray, which ended with the latter's death at Donibristle in 1592, is evidence of the changing stresses of local society. It demonstrates that local systems of alliance may have been long-established but were by no means immutable.

The various power struggles within the country had their counterparts in the towns. In order to secure a Protestant establishment within the burgh of Aberdeen the prevailing understanding of the burgh community needed to be broadened to accomodate the 'new' men, anxious that their status be recognised by the appropriate degree of power and privilege. The primary battle to secure this objective focussed on the council chamber, the key to domination of the town. The chief problem facing successive governments in dealing with Aberdeen was the creation of a constructive alternative to the oligarchy, which had reigned supreme for almost a century. By the beginning of the 1580s the Menzies family had held the provostship for three generations, the normal span of close involvement in burgh affairs for any urban patrician family. The declining impetus and energies of a family, whose commercial interests were second to their pretensions to landed status, coincided with a real shift in the sense of burgh community. During the 1580s the craft guilds came to realise their own role as repositories of burgh tradition, independent and alternative bodies, and powerful formers of opinion. It was the alliance between the 'new' men of the professions and the new aristocracy of the crafts that created the first viable alternative government to that of the 'auld bluid' of the town, hitherto secure in their urban aristocratic ideology. It was this,

the first wide fissure in the facade of burgh unity and solidarity, that promised some future for moderate Protestantism in the town.

Another factor which might possibly have favoured the reception and growth of Protestantism in the burgh was its size. By European standards Aberdeen was not a large town. In Germany it would have ranked amongst the two hundred or so medium to small-sized towns.¹² Its profile is a familiar one: a small in-bred society with most of the wealth and power concentrated in the hands of a few. In such a society everybody knew everybody else, and the entire population would probably have been able to gather in the single parish church. By closing down the religious houses with their alternative centres of worship, the Reformation gave added importance to the parish church of St Nicholas. Whereas in Catholic days there had been pluriformity of practice and variety of choice in religious matters, the Reformation established the possibility of uniformity. Whilst Aberdeen was small in area it was by no means dense in population, it should have been comparatively easy to establish the machinery of surveillance and repression in the burgh. What was lacking in Aberdeen was the political will to establish any such effective system. In effect the positive advantages to the Kirk of Aberdeen's size were outweighed by the negative, in terms of the demands of kinship and commercial alliance, which were correspondingly greater in a smaller society.

The evidence suggest that during the sixteenth century Aberdeen became more introverted, and its ruling elite more isolated from the constituency they represented. The Reformation and the survival of conservative sentiment had contributed to this sense of alienation. During the fifty years before 1593 the gradual

withdrawal from total involvement in the burgh by the leading members of its government had been gathering pace. This process had been characterised by an increasing 'gentrification' of the Aberdeen oligarchs, and their transformation into merchant-lairds. Even their commercial involvement with the town and its harbour had declined considerably.¹³ There was no shortage of alternative candidates for government amongst the craft aristocracy and the professional classes, who were quite willing to take the places of the oligarchy. In such circumstances, conservatism in general, and Catholicism in particular, although they might not have been the prime distinguishing characteristics between the parties, were at least important subsidiary features of those differences. The practice of Catholicism retreated to the household and, eventually, to the country estate. Thus, whilst it had not forced an equivalent withdrawal from public life in the burgh, it provided a useful ideology to accompany it.

The prime obstacle facing the progress of the Reformation during these years was the apparent absence of popular pressure for change. Extremism, of any kind, was a novel phenomenon in Aberdeen, and a very unwelcome one at that. Whilst it may be true that in Germany the Reformation was never the work of a city council, such Reformation as there was in Aberdeen after 1560 was tightly controlled and directed by the council. The only occasions on which such control was threatened were when central government applied consistent pressure for reform; such pressure was usually accompanied by the personal presence of successive regents in the town, ensuring that the ordinations of central government were obeyed. If the Reformation in Aberdeen had been totally dependent on the

populace it would have been a great deal longer in coming to the burgh. In Aberdeen, as in Edinburgh, popular Protestantism did not prepare the way for the Reformation, neither did it follow rapidly on its heels. The existence of a small, but vocal, Protestant minority would have contributed greatly to the success of the Reformation. As it was, the council's pattern of response to largely external pressure allowed the oligarchy to tailor the Reformation settlement to local needs; paradoxically the events of 1560 increased rather than decreased oligarchical power in the burgh. They allowed the council to extend the control it had enjoyed over the local Church before 1560, and to develop the sense of the burgh's religious self-sufficiency: for many years there were very few to challenge this pattern. Dynamic and radical Protestantism was slow to make its appearance in Aberdeen. Leadership from the ministry may have been lukewarm, but equally, Protestant sentiments amongst the most important laymen of the town were discrete and unaggressive. The burgh registers record no details of Protestant activists, neither are there any obvious accounts of Protestant polemics. The character and policies of the ministry appear to have accurately reflected the interests and opinions of their congregations.

Whereas it may be the case that Knox's role in Edinburgh's reformation has been exaggerated, at least he acted as a spokesman for a recognisably distinct body of opinion in the town which was not without influence.¹⁴ In Aberdeen there does not appear to have been any single individual with enough confidence or authority to speak for the Protestants in the town. A common characteristic shared by most of the early ministers of Aberdeen seems

to have been a certain blend of moderation and good humour. The scholastic learning and moderation of Adam Heriot were two of the qualities recommending him to the citizens of Aberdeen as their minister.¹⁵ His successor, John Craig, may have deepened the Protestant colour of Aberdeen, but he was also known for being 'much more learned than Knox', steeped in scholasticism, and pleasant and jocular by temperament.¹⁶ When a second charge was added to Aberdeen in 1577 it was to accomodate David Cunningham, the first Protestant bishop of Aberdeen, appointed to succeed Bishop Gordon. Cunningham had previously studied at Bourges, of which university Alexander Arbuthnot was also an alumnus.¹⁷ Cunningham's subsequent career as dean of the faculty at Glasgow, and minister to the regent Morton made him an ideal candidate, from Morton's point of view, to succeed the conservative Bishop Gordon.¹⁸ None of those charged with the ministry in Aberdeen were natives of the place or familiar with the peculiarities of its constitution. Cunningham's own connections were in the west of Scotland, as were those of Peter Blackburn who took up his pastoral care of Aberdeen in 1582.¹⁹

Heriot, Cunningham and Blackburn had all studied at St Andrews, and the latter two had taught in the University of Glasgow before coming to Aberdeen. Blackburn had been an associate of Melville in his efforts to re-structure the University of Glasgow. Initially Blackburn had strongly defended Aristotle and all he represented, but he was eventually won over to Melville's educational programme. Whatever credit Cunningham and Blackburn held with the Melvillians was seriously diminished by their both accepting the bishopric of Aberdeen in opposition to strict presbyterian principles. In fact the burgh was not to have one of its own sons as minister

until Master William Leask was named as substitute for Blackburn in 1585.²⁰ The first full-time Aberdonian minister was Robert Howie, who was appointed in 1591.²¹ None of these men, save possibly Craig, offered much of a threat to the council. The ministry in Aberdeen gives the impression of always being well controlled by the council. The ministers were never the intimates of the council, neither was there ever a close partnership between them. Ministers were seen as the functionaries of civic religion and were not invited to take too large a share in the formulation of policy.

If the variety of Protestantism was far from dynamic, the quality of Catholicism that opposed it could not be described as vigorous. As a pattern of social observances and social behaviour, Catholicism needed a particular way of life, and a particular set of social institutions to support it; deprived of those its presence in the town could not fail to wither away. The presence of so many crypto-Catholics and conservative sympathisers in the higher echelons of burgh society prolonged, without preserving, some vestiges of Catholic life and attitudes. Once their hold on the burgh's destinies was broken then the old ways were bound to suffer. The lively and revolutionary forces articulated by the events of 1560 took thirty years to jostle their way to the forefront of burgh life, and seriously challenge the older tradition. The victory of Master John Cheyne, and the coalition of forces which supported him in 1593, was the culmination of the century-old process of withdrawal from the burgh by the leading burgess families. They were never to be as closely identified with burgh life and policy again. The constant friction between town and country was solved for them by a commitment to the way of life of the gentry. However, in leaving the

burgh they took their Catholicism with them, and helped to open a new chapter in the history of the Catholic community in the north-east of Scotland.

1. APS, iii, p. 541.
2. A.G. Dickens, The German Nation and Martin Luther (London, 1976), p. 181.
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